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ACTS 17:16-34
- AN APOLOGETIC MODEL
THEN AND NOW?

Lars Olof Martin Dahle

Candidatus theologiae

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Open University for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

July 2001

Sponsored by the Whitefield Institute, Oxford.

None of the following has been submitted previously for any degree or other qualification to this or any other university or institution; nor has any part of it been contributed by another party than the author, excepting passages which are enclosed in quotation marks and referenced by footnote; nor has any part of it been published.

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Acts 17:16-34. An Apologetic Model Then and Now?

Thesis Abstract

Presupposing a specific understanding of ‘apologetics’ and the need to investigate biblical apologetic foundations, this thesis explores the hypothesis that Acts 17:16-34 is to be seen as an apologetic model ‘then’ and ‘now’.

It seems plausible, in view of the content and purposes of Acts, that Luke recorded this narrative about Paul in Athens, not just to provide confirmation of the truth of the Christian faith for insiders, but primarily as an apologetic model for relating to Gentile outsiders. This understanding of Acts 17:16-34 as a Lucan apologetic model seems consonant *both* with the contemporary exegetical discussion on authenticity, the Athenian context and Paul as speaker, *and* with a responsible exegetical study of the text itself.

This thesis identifies key positive elements of this Lucan model: the apostle presents essential Christian truth claims in Athens, about who God is and how he has revealed himself, which should be seen as indicators of a normative worldview *content*. It is further argued that contextual understanding, application of appropriate justification procedures, and ‘positive deconstruction’ of alternative worldviews characterize Paul’s *approach* in the *agora*. The justification for the apostle’s truth claims is an overall *argument* from natural theology through ultimate authority to the resurrection, which is offered with the threefold *aim* of generating interest, persuading, and confronting.

Through a critical comparative review of the extent to which contemporary apologists *Alister E. McGrath* and *Donald A. Carson* apply this Lucan-Pauline model to the specific challenge of postmodernism, it is argued that the content, the approach, the arguments, and the aims of this first-century model justifiably may be seen as valid and relevant for contemporary apologetics in comparable *agora* contexts. A perspective is also offered towards a more adequate application of the model to the postmodern challenge.

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I am also indebted to the Second Supervisors, Dr. Hans Kvalbein (Professor of New Testament Theology and Exegesis at The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, Oslo) and Rev. Jens Olav Mæland (previously Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Fjellhaug Theological Seminary, Oslo), for crucial methodological, exegetical and apologetic contributions to the development of the thesis.

Various drafts of most chapters have been presented to research seminars in Kristiansand, Oslo and Oxford and I am grateful to the participants for critique and encouragement.

Thanks to past and present staff at the Whitefield Institute for assisting and facilitating my research in so many ways, and to a number of friends in UK for hospitality, friendship and support. Scholarships from *The Gimlekollen Media Trust (Medielegatet)* and from *Norwegian Christian Broadcasting Association (KKL)* covered much of the expenses in the initial stages, for which I am grateful.

The research has been done largely on a part-time basis, while being Academic Dean and Lecturer in ‘Media, Ethics and Worldviews’ at *Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication*, Kristiansand. Whereas this combination of roles has been highly demanding, it has also proved mutually enriching both for the development of the thesis and of our college. My colleagues at Gimlekollen have thus for a number of years endured

constant references to Acts 17 – while at the same time contributing to my understanding of the dynamics of ‘*agora* contexts’. I would like to express my gratitude to past and present Principals at Gimlekollen, Mr. Geir Sandvik and Rev. Knut Sigurd Aasebø, for sabbatical leaves, financial support and sharing the concern for truth in ‘the marketplace’.

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Lars Dahle

Kristiansand, Norway; July 2001.

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List of Abbreviations

General abbreviations

A.D.	<i>anno domini</i> of the Christian era
B.C.	Before (the birth of) Christ
c	circa, about (with dates)
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
ed.	edition; editor(s); edited by
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
esp.	especially
f. or ff.	following verse or verses
fragm.	fragment (of document)
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament)
MT	Masoretic Text (standard Hebrew text of the Old Testament)
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
pl.	plural
v. or vv.	verse or verses

Books of the Bible

Old Testament:

Gen., Ex., Lev., Num., Deut., Josh., Judg., Ruth, 1-2 Sam., 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chron., Ezra, Neh., Esther,
 Job, Ps., Prov., Eccles., Song, Is., Jer., Lam., Ezek., Dan., Hos., Joel, Amos, Obad., Jon., Mic.,
 Nahum, Hab., Zeph., Hag., Zech., Mal.

New Testament:

Mt., Mk., Lk., Jn., Acts, Rom., 1-2 Cor., Gal., Eph., Phil., Col., 1-2 Thess., 1-2 Tim., Tit., Philem., Heb.,
 Jas., 1-2 Pet., 1-2-3 Jn., Jude, Rev.

The Apocrypha and Septuagint

1-2-3-4 Macc.	1-2-3-4 Maccabees
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>T. Naph.</i>	<i>Testament of Naphthali</i>

Early Christian Literature

Eusebius

<i>Hist. Eccl.</i>	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Praep. Ev.</i>	<i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i>

Justin Martyr

<i>Apol. I, II</i>	<i>Apology I, II</i>
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Classical and Hellenistic Writers and Sources

Aeschylus

<i>Eumen.</i>	<i>Eumenides</i>
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Aratus

<i>Phaen.</i>	<i>Phaenomena</i>
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Aristobolus

fragm. *Fragment*

Aristotle

Rhet. *Rhetorica*

Cicero

Her. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*

Nat. Deor. *De Natura Deorum*

Tusc. *Tusculanae Disputationes*

Corp. Herm. *Corpus Hermeticum*

Dio Chrysostom

Or. *Orationes*

Diogenes Laertius

Vit. *Vitae*

Euripides

Heracl. *Heraclidae*

Herc. fur. *Hercules Furens*

Homer

Odys. *Odyssey*

Josephus

Ant. *Antiquities of the Jews*

Lucretius

Nat. *De Rerum Natura*

Pausanias

Descr. *Graeciae Description*

Philostratus

Vit. Ap. *Vita Apollonii*

Plato

Apol. *Apologia*

Euthphr. *Euthyphro*

Leg. *Leges*

Phaed. *Phaedo*

Tim. *Timaeus*

Plutarch

Mor. *Moralia*

Quintillian

Inst. Orat. *Institutio Oratoria*

Seneca (the Younger)

Ep. *Epistulae*

Virgil

Geor. *Georgics*

Xenophon

Apol. *Apologia*

Mem. *Memorabilia Socratis*

Dead Sea Scrolls

1QH *Hodayot, or Thanksgiving Hymns*

1QM *Milhamah, or War Scroll*

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BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961; 10th ed.)

- CIJ *Corpus inscriptionum Judaicarum* I-II, ed. J.B. Frey (2 vols.; Rome. 1936-1952)
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XX

ACTS 17:16-34
- AN APOLOGETIC MODEL
THEN AND NOW?

Lars Olof Martin Dahle

Preface

Work on the thesis started because of an interest in the theory and practice of apologetics both in an historical and a contemporary perspective. It became clear that there is a widespread unease with apologetics in contemporary theology, despite its prominence historically as a theological discipline. Wherever practised, however, contemporary apologetics seems largely to be characterised by a neglect of biblical foundations and models. Where biblical material *is* used, Acts 17:16-34 keeps recurring as a biblical paradigm for apologetics. This has not been fully developed, however, neither exegetically nor in terms of contemporary apologetics. A general interest in apologetics has thus led to an investigation of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model ‘then’ and ‘now’.

1. INTRODUCING THE CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF ACTS 17:16-34 AS AN APOLOGETIC MODEL 'THEN' AND 'NOW'

Outline:

1.1 The Research Problem

1.2 What is Apologetics?

1.3 Major Reasons for the Selection of Acts 17:16-34

1.4 Key Hermeneutical Issues

1.5 Key Research Questions

1.6 The Procedure of the Exploration

1.1 The Research Problem

This thesis investigates Acts 17:16-34 and its implications for apologetics. The focus is on an analysis and an assessment of this New Testament passage as an apologetic model

‘then’ and ‘now’. This means that *the thesis explores this passage as a Lucan description of Paul as an apologist in Athens, whether it was intended as an apologetic model ‘then’ (i.e. in its original New Testament context), and if, and (in that case) to what extent, it may function as an apologetic model ‘now’ (i.e. in the contemporary context).*

1.2 What is Apologetics? ¹

An exploration of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model ‘then’ and ‘now’ presupposes a justifiable definition of ‘apologetics’.

1.2.1 Lexical definitions and common usage

1. The term ‘apologetics’ is derived from the Greek word ἀπολογία, which as a general term describes “*a speech in defence*”². More precisely, ἀπολογία *either* denotes the defence speech itself *or* the action of giving a verbal defence, an answer, a reply or an account in the face of an accusation (κατηγορία).³

2. In ancient Greek, ἀπολογία could be used as a technical term for a forensic speech.⁴

Forensic speeches were typically related to “past events, and concerned with truth or

¹ This section presents *a key assumption* for the argument of this thesis.

² LSJ ἀπολογία.

³ See BAGD ἀπολογία.

⁴ “It was a term used in the courts of law in the ancient world.” (Cowan 2000:8) Falkenroth writes accordingly about ἀπολογία as a term “from criminal law” (Falkenroth 1986:97).

justice"⁵. The context was usually the formal setting in the courtroom. Classical examples of judicial defences include the defence of Socrates, as recorded in Plato's *Apol.* and Xenophon's *Apol.* *'Apologetics' as used in this thesis, however, is not a formal forensic or judicial term per se.*

3. The word ἀπολογία occurs a number of times in the New Testament,⁶ both in the sense of a defence speech (Acts 22:1; 1 Cor. 9:3) and of an action in court (2 Tim. 4:16; Acts 25:16). It is also used more generally of an eagerness to defend oneself (2 Cor. 7:11), as well as of the specific defence of the Christian gospel (Phil. 1:7,16; 1 Pet. 3:15⁷).

4. As a modern English term, 'apologetics' has been defined as "*the art, science, or practice of arguing in defence or in explanation, as of an idea, belief, person, etc.*"⁸. The word is often used to describe *the general (or specific) reasoned defence of a given religious position (or worldview)*⁹. This implies that any worldview has its own apologetic

⁵ Satterthwaite 1993:357.

⁶ See BAGD ἀπολογία.

⁷ On the apologetic significance of 1 Pet. 3:15, see DiCello 1999.

⁸ Longman: 'apologetics'. A similar definition (i.e. "the defense of a cause or party supposed to be of paramount importance to the speaker") has recently been applied as an analytical tool in an historical study of pagan, Jewish and Christian 'apologetic' in the Roman Empire (see Edwards et al 1999:1).

⁹ This thesis uses the term 'worldview' as defined by Sire: "A worldview is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world." (Sire 1997:16)

traditions, approaches and representatives.¹⁰ The most common use of apologetics, however, is as a specific description of *the reasoned defence of the Christian faith*.¹¹

5. The word 'apologetics', as used in this thesis, is a theological term. In Christian theology, apologetics has traditionally been assigned the role of *defending and explaining the reliability and relevance of the Christian faith in the face of historic and contemporary challenges*. Standard textbooks in Christian apologetics tend to distinguish between the 'science' of apologetics (which is a theological discipline) and the 'art' of apologetics (which refers to actual 'apologies' being offered as responses to specific challenges to the Christian faith).¹² In Christian theology, apologetics usually describes a certain mode of

¹⁰ Griffiths writes accordingly about what he describes as *the principle of the necessity of interreligious apologetics* (see Griffiths, P. 1991:1): "If representative intellectuals belonging to some specific religious community come to judge at a particular time that some or all of their own doctrine-expressing sentences are incompatible with some alien religious claim(s), then they should feel obliged to engage in both positive and negative apologetics vis-à-vis these alien religious claim(s) and their promulgators." (Griffiths, P. 1991:3) I have two objections to Griffith's argument, however: a) His concept of "interreligious apologetics" should have been expanded also to include secular worldviews. b) He unwarrantedly restricts interreligious apologetics to "representative intellectuals", as if apologetics as such was limited to such elitist groups. As defined in this thesis, apologetics is an activity that is found at various levels. These two objections indicate the need to modify Griffith's principle along these lines, but do not invalidate the principle as such. A representative *example* of such 'interreligious apologetics' is found in Chapman 1995:172-225.

¹¹ This is the way standard reference works define 'apologetics'; e.g. as in Webster: "1. systematic argumentative tactics or discourse in defense; 2. that branch of theology devoted to the defense of a religious faith and addressed primarily to criticism originating from outside the religious faith; esp. such defense of the Christian faith".

¹² See e.g. Richardson, A. 1947:19-20; Reid, J. K. 1969:9-10; Lewis, G. 1990:21; and McGrath, A. 1992a:12-13. The 'science' of (or *theoretical*) apologetics has helpfully been defined as "that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith" (Craig 1994:xi). The 'art' of (or *applied*) apologetics has correspondingly been defined as "the utilization of appropriate justification procedures and relevant data in the actual presentation and defense of the Gospel to a particular target audience" (Netland 1994:96; see also Netland 1988).

theological argumentation, which includes a defence against accusations, critiques of other beliefs and a positive commendation of the Christian faith as truth.¹³ This is related to the common and essential distinction between ‘*negative*’ (or defensive) apologetics and ‘*positive*’ (or offensive) apologetics.¹⁴ Whereas the aim of ‘negative’ apologetics has been appropriately described as establishing ‘the epistemic permission’ to accept Christian truth claims, the intention of ‘positive’ apologetics, on the other hand, has been aptly described as establishing ‘the epistemic obligation’ to accept Christian truth claims.¹⁵ Furthermore, apologetics is usually considered to be relevant for both Christians and non-Christians.¹⁶ Apologetics is thus widely regarded to be concerned with the rational justification of Christian truth claims for both Christians and non-Christians.

1.2.2 Assuming a specific understanding of apologetics

This thesis assumes a specific understanding of apologetics as the rational justification of Christian truth claims over against specific questions, objections and alternatives, in order to establish 'the epistemic permission' and 'the epistemic obligation' of the Christian

¹³ See e.g. Dulles 1971; Mæland 1984; McGrath, A. 1992a:9; and Guerra 1995:3,180.

¹⁴ See e.g. Craig 1994:xv; Frame 1994:1-3; Keyes 1999:56; and Cowan 2000:8.

¹⁵ Thus, Christian apologetics has both a negative dimension (showing ‘the epistemic permission’ of belief) and a positive dimension (showing ‘the epistemic obligation’ to belief). See e.g. Griffiths, P. 1991; Nash 1988:14-16; and Netland 1994:101.

¹⁶ Craig seems representative for many apologists, when he claims that “apologetics specifically serves to show to unbelievers the truth of the Christian faith, to confirm that faith to believers, and to reveal and explore the connections between Christian doctrine and other truths” (Craig 1994:xi).

*faith for both Christians and non-Christians.*¹⁷ This definition seems justifiable in the light of common usage and implies that the following is assumed about apologetics:

a) The term 'apologetics' is limited to denote 'the rational justification of Christian truth claims'. Thus understood, apologetics takes on *a significant yet limited role*¹⁸. In terms of practice, then, apologetics (as an 'art') is distinct from, but often intertwined with, the *kerygma* (the actual proclamation and offer of the Gospel)¹⁹, and in terms of theory, apologetics (as a 'science') is distinct from, but is informed by, biblical and systematic theology.²⁰ The definition introduced above also implies that there are specific Christian truth claims and that these central truth claims can and should be justified rationally²¹. This rational justification is done on the basis of key criteria of truth²², thus seeking to show²³,

¹⁷ For other related definitions, see Richardson, A. 1947:19-20; Reid, J. K. 1969:9-10; Dulles 1971:13; McGrath, A. 1992a:9 (see also 6.2.1.1); Mæland 1985:112; Craig 1994:xi; Gustavsson 1997:196-199; and Geisler 1999:37.

¹⁸ An example of a limiting feature of apologetics *per se* is that "the true story, the narrative, the illustration may unlock more suppressed emotions and bring translation to a person better than any argument could" (Zacharias 2000c:40). This seems to be due to the role of imagination in communication (cf. Hart 2000).

¹⁹ Groothuis points out, accordingly, over against Newbigin, that apologetics in principle should be seen as distinct both from the actual proclamation of the Gospel and the communal manifestation of the Gospel. (See Groothuis 2000:157; cf. Newbigin 1989:227 and Newbigin 1995:94.)

²⁰ This emphasis is found e.g. in Alister E. McGrath's writings; see further 6.2.1.1.

²¹ This include e.g. "arguments to the effect (1) that there is a God; (2) that human beings are radically estranged from God; (3) that the life and death of Jesus Christ would be such as to constitute a remedy for this estrangement; and (4) that this life and death occurred as a matter of historical fact" (Meynell 1993:9).

²² Cook points out the need for Christians to "develop appropriate criteria for truth and falsity ..., which will allow truth claims to be made and reinforce the spreading of the gospel and the defence of the faith" (Cook 1988c:706). *Three key criteria of truth* are assumed in this thesis. These criteria are 1) 'consistency and coherence', 2) 'correspondence with reality', and 3) 'pragmatic relevance or adequacy'. (See further Chapman 1977a; Cook 1986:26; Cook 1996:3-7; Geisler 1976:13-147; Groothuis 2000; Gustavsson 1997:28-38; Nash 1988:51-66; Nash 1999:228-

within the limitations of human rationality²⁴, that the Christian faith, in its central truth claims, a) makes sense as a coherent worldview, b) corresponds to the known facts, and c) is the most adequate (and attractive) worldview available.

b) Apologetics is further understood as a responding activity 'over against specific questions, objections and alternatives'.²⁵ This implies that the 'art' of apologetics is seen as a context-specific activity where relevant questions are answered, relevant objections are dealt with, and relevant alternatives are 'positively deconstructed'²⁶ in order to justify Christian truth claims. Thus, such questions, objections and alternatives are shown to be invalid obstacles to accepting Christian truth claims as true.

c) It is further implied that apologetics is practised 'in order to establish 'the epistemic permission' and 'the epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith'. '*Negative*' apologetics argues thus, over against relevant questions, objections and alternatives, that a person is epistemically permitted to accept the truth claims of the Christian faith. '*Positive*' apologetics, then, on the other hand, argues, over against relevant questions, objections and

251; Zacharias 1994:121-131; and Zacharias 1996:189-193.)

²³ Craig makes the crucial distinction (in Cowan 2000:28-54) between '*showing*' and '*knowing*' the Christian truth claims to be true, plausibly arguing that whereas the former activity primarily is related to the task of apologetics, the latter activity is related directly to the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. These plausible and significant distinctions will be presupposed in this thesis.

²⁴ Christian apologetics should thus "recognize the limits of reason and when there are unreasonable and inappropriate demands for proof and justification. This may be demonstrated by showing that nothing would count as satisfying these demands." (Cook 1988a:226)

²⁵ A significant example of this understanding of apologetics is found in C. Chapman's trilogy; see further Chapman 1977a, Chapman 1977b and Chapman 1977c.

²⁶ The expression 'positive deconstruction' was coined in Pollard 1997:43-70 (on the basis of

alternatives, that a person is epistemically obliged to (i.e. ought to, but is not coerced to) accept central truth claims of the Christian faith.²⁷ Thus, apologetics is both a clarifying and a challenging activity.

d) It is also assumed that Christian apologetics is aimed at 'both Christians and non-Christians'.²⁸ In terms of *'negative'* apologetics, this means showing a) both the Christian and the non-Christian that it is not incoherent or irrational to believe and b) the non-Christian that there are valid grounds to accept central Christian truth claims. In terms of *'positive'* apologetics, this means showing a) both the Christian and the non-Christian that the claims to the absolute truth of the Christian faith are valid and b) both the Christian and the non-Christian that relevant questions, objections and alternatives do not constitute sufficient reasons for not accepting central Christian truth claims.

This thesis, then, investigates Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics on the basis of this specific understanding of apologetics.

1.3 Major Reasons for the Selection of Acts 17:16-34

The justification for the focus in this thesis on Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model 'then' and 'now' includes the following key reasons.

Cook 1996) and is also expounded in Watkins 1999:113-121. See further 5.3.3.3 and 5.4.2.5.

²⁷ This implies arguing that there are sufficient reasons to accept central Christian truth claims, at least as more plausible than alternative worldviews.

1. *Scholars point out that Acts 17:16-34 is the most extensive example in the New Testament of a dialogue with, and an address to, a pagan and pluralistic context.*²⁹
2. *Some contemporary biblical scholars suggest that Acts 17:16-34 should be understood as apologetics, and, as such, possibly intended by Luke as a model.*³⁰
3. *Some contemporary historians suggest that Acts 17:16-34 is a biblical passage which has played a key role in the history of apologetics, and thus contributed – explicitly or implicitly - to significant apologetic discussions, paradigms and argumentative strategies.*³¹
4. *It has been observed by a number of authors that the original non-Jewish pluralistic context of Acts 17:16-34 to some extent seems comparable to contemporary contexts characterized by pluralism and biblical illiteracy.*³²

²⁸ Due to the nature of the (supposed) original setting of Acts 17:16-34, the emphasis in this thesis will be on apologetics in relation to non-Christians. Chapter 2 will discuss Luke's possible intentions with this passage for his Christian readership.

²⁹ See e.g. Lewis, G. & Demarest 1996 I:88 and Witherington 1998:511.

³⁰ See esp. Bruce 1977:35,49; Edwards et al 1999:4-6,8; Hemer 1989b:243,253-255; and Witherington 1998:533.

³¹ Skarsaune argues that this is particularly evident in Justin's apologies (see Skarsaune 1996; Skarsaune 1998). Shotwell emphasizes that Justin's seminal role (as an apologist) "is evident from the fact that Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen and even Eusebius adopted his apologetic material for their own apologies" (Shotwell 1998:52). McGrath points to Tertullian's "celebrated contrast between Athens and Jerusalem" (McGrath, A. 1995a:5) and to Augustine's exodus model on the relation between Christianity and pagan philosophy (see McGrath, A. 1995a:6).

³² See e.g. Mæland 1985:17; Hemer 1989b:255; Carson 1996b:496; Wright 1997:94; and to some extent also McGrath, A. 1998a:9-10. This, of course, is not only true of Athens, but also of other key first-century Hellenistic centres such as Corinth and Ephesus.

*5. Paul's approach in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) is referred to by some contemporary apologists as a model for apologetics in the modern secular and pluralistic world, but has never been fully developed as such.*³³

The exploration of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model 'then' and 'now' seems thus legitimate as *a crucial investigation into what has been claimed to be a key example of New Testament foundations and models for apologetics.*³⁴

1.4 Key Hermeneutical Issues

A number of key hermeneutical issues arise from the nature of the Book of Acts, from the character of the passage itself, and from the problems related to using and applying such a biblical text as a model in apologetics. Thus, in order to explore and assess possible apologetic patterns, approaches, paradigms and argumentative strategies in Acts 17:16-34, the following hermeneutical issues have to be properly addressed.

1.4.1 The textual content and clarity of Acts 17:16-34

The first issue is the textual content and clarity of Acts 17:16-34. Does the Lucan account of Paul's visit to Athens – when taken at face value – describe a discernible,

³³ See esp. Smith 1981:xxiii-xxiv,246-271; Green, M. 1993a:76-77; Charles 1995; Carson 1996b:496-505; Cook 1996:2,6,171-174; Gustavsson 1997:222-233; and McGrath, A. 1998c:259-265. Cf. also Dahle 1998.

³⁴ Geisler claims thus that this passage is "the classic case of apologetics in the New Testament" (Geisler 1999:39). Green includes Acts 17:16-34 in a brief overview of significant biblical passages for apologetics (Green, M. 1993b:112). Surprisingly enough, however, Acts

conscious and coherent apologetic pattern, approach or strategy? If such a model – or maybe even several models – could be uncovered, it still remains to assess what the status of this/these would be. For such a model to be repeatable or recommended - or to have any normative authority for apologetics - the following issues would also have to be adequately addressed.

1.4.2 *The narrative character of Acts 17:16-34*

The second issue is the narrative character of Acts 17:16-34. It seems highly plausible that historical precedent in the Bible must be related to authorial intent in order to have any normative value.³⁵ This implies that Luke should be seen to have intended to establish a positive precedent – whether normative, recommended or repeatable – of apologetics in Acts 17:16-34, *if* this passage can be seen to a) fit a positive repeated pattern in Acts³⁶ and b) relate to Luke's purpose(s) for writing Acts³⁷.

17:16-34 is not mentioned in Hughes 1971. See also Ramm 1979.

³⁵ I agree with Fee that historical precedent in the Bible, “to have normative value, must be related to *intent*. That is, if it can be shown that the purpose of a given narrative is to *establish* precedent, then such precedent should be regarded as normative.” (Fee 1982:99) He adds that “in matters of Christian experience, and even more so of Christian practice, *biblical precedents may sometimes be regarded as repeatable patterns – even if they are not to be regarded as normative.*” (Fee 1982:101). For a thorough defence of the centrality of authorial intent, see Vanhoozer 1998:201-280.

³⁶ Admitting his indebtedness to Fee (see previous footnote), this is suggested by Witherington as a principle for distinguishing “what Luke sees as norms and what he sees as merely historically interesting” (Witherington 1998:100). See also Stott 1990:11-12.

³⁷ This means that it is also essential properly to assess “the *function* of the passage at hand” (Liefeld 1995:116).

1.4.3 *The historical authenticity of Acts 17:16-34*

The third issue is the historicity of Acts 17:16-34. The authenticity of any biblical narrative where the truth claims of the given text involves historicity³⁸ is crucial when determining its didactic and theological value. The focus here is not primarily Luke's credibility as a historian as such, but whether the passage should be seen as a reliable source to authentic apostolic apologetic thinking and practice. Such a claim to reliability would be valid *if* it can be shown that the passage “shows 1. traces of the alleged situation into which it was purported to have been delivered and 2. traces of the personality and traits of the alleged speaker”³⁹.

1.4.4 *The theological validity of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics*

The fourth issue is the theological validity of Acts 17:16-34. Commentators would agree in seeing the Lucan account of Paul's speeches in Acts as a secondary source to Paul's theology from a strictly historical point of view. This implies that the apologetic model(s) that might be uncovered in Acts 17:16-34 must be compared with appropriate passages in Paul's letters (as the primary source of Pauline theology), in order to assess whether the Areopagus Speech should be seen as *genuine, representative and complete* as Pauline, apostolic apologetics. Such a comparison should be done with the intention to

³⁸ This important qualification is found in Long: "Only where a text's *truth claims* involve historicity does a denial of historicity become a denial of the *truth value* of the biblical text, and thus become a problem for those holding a high view of Scripture." (Long 1994:170) This will be discussed in relation to Acts 17:16-34 in 3.3.

³⁹ Gempf 1993b:301. He adds: "If discontinuities appear, then there is reason for questioning

explore, if possible, legitimate ways to show consistency between Acts 17 and the various relevant Pauline passages.⁴⁰ This relates to the wider question of whether Acts 17:16-34 should be seen as an example of genuine, Judeo-Christian apologetics in a pagan and pluralistic context.

1.4.5 The applicability of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics to other contexts

The fifth issue is the applicability of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics to other contexts. If the historical authenticity and the theological validity of the apologetics of Acts 17:16-34 can be established as legitimate – or even plausible – interpretative options, the fundamental question of its applicability to other (more or less) comparable cultural contexts (as a supposedly repeatable, recommended or normative model) still has to be critically assessed. A critical study of this passage as an apologetic model might yield some underlying theological principles – or argumentative and communicative strategies – for apologetics. Such principles, if uncovered, would be relevant to any other – or at least to comparable – cultural contexts. This is closely related to the question of the applicability of the passage as an apologetic model in the contemporary context.

the faithfulness of the speech to the event." (Gempf 1993b:301) See further 3.3.1.

⁴⁰ A thorough defence of the legitimacy of such a procedure – when done appropriately - is found in Blomberg 1986.

1.5 Key Research Questions

The preceding hermeneutical discussion leads to the identification of two major research questions – and two sub-questions – for the exploration of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model in this thesis. The purpose of this thesis is to *give valid answers to these questions and thereby to make a critical and creative contribution both to the 'science' and the 'art' of apologetics*.

1.5.1 An apologetic model 'then'?

The focus of the first major research question is on the textual content and clarity of this passage as apologetics and the potential status of this content: *If Acts 17:16-34 is seen as an apologetic model in its New Testament context, can its key elements be identified, and if so, are they intended as normative, recommended or repeatable elements of a positive model?* This means that the actual content of the passage must be properly analysed and assessed.

In order to answer this major research question, however, two sub-questions also need to be addressed. *First*, in terms of the narrator and the narratees⁴¹: *Did Luke intend to provide his readers with an apologetic model in Acts 17:16-34 by recording what Paul supposedly did in Athens?* *Secondly*, in terms of the orator and the oratees: *Does Acts 17:16-34 provide*

⁴¹ As Given has pointed out, Acts 17:16-34 must be read at two levels, i.e. *both* on the level of narrator/narratees *and* on the level of orator/oratees (see Given 1995).

valid insights into the apologetic thinking and practice of the apostle Paul? These two sub-questions will only be answered in a limited way in this thesis.

1.5.2 An apologetic model 'now'?

The focus of the second major research question is on the potential contemporary applicability of the apologetic content of this passage: *If Acts 17:16-34 is established as an apologetic New Testament model, to what extent can its content be applied with validity and relevance in contemporary apologetics?* This may be answered through an analysis of how representative apologists have applied this passage in a contemporary context. Such an analysis leads to a critical comparison between the model 'then' and 'now'.

1.6 The Procedure of the Exploration

This introductory chapter has introduced the thesis *as a critical exploration of Acts 17:16-34 as a potential apologetic model in its New Testament and contemporary contexts. The procedure of this exploration is as follows:*

Chapter 2 presents a preliminary analysis of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics (when taken at face value) in its immediate literary context (i.e. the Book of Acts as apologetics). This preliminary analysis is taken further *both* by a critical literature review of key issues in the contemporary exegetical discussion of Acts 17:16-34 in *chapter 3* and a detailed exegetical study of the passage in *chapter 4*. This dual approach, which naturally has some degree of overlap in the material, constitutes the basis for *chapter 5* with its focus on a systematic analysis and assessment of the content of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model 'then'.

Chapter 6 contains a critical dialogue with two significant, contemporary apologists on their use of this New Testament passage in relation to a specific contemporary challenge. Thus, *chapters 2-5* deal with the first major research question and the two sub-questions, whereas the focus of *chapter 6* is on the second major research question. Finally, *chapter 7* presents summary and conclusions, including some key implications for the ‘science’ and the ‘art’ of apologetics.

2. ACTS 17:16-34 IN THE CONTEXT OF ACTS AS APOLOGETICS: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Outline:

2.1 Introducing the Chapter

2.2 Acts 17:16-34 in the Context of the Practice of Apologetics Recorded in Acts

2.3 Acts 17:16-34 in the Context of an Apologetic Purpose of Acts

2.4 Preliminary Conclusions

2.1 Introducing the Chapter

Taken at face value, Acts 17:16-34 describes Paul's visit to Athens on his so-called 'Second Missionary Journey'. What seems evident from the biblical text, as a minimum, is that it claims to be a Lucan account of a supposedly Pauline speech (17:22-31) within a narrative framework (17:16-21, 32-34). The apostle is depicted as a public speaker and debater in the synagogue (17:17a), the marketplace (17:17-18) and the "Areopagus" (17:19-33).

This thesis assumes that the commentator's first task is a preliminary study of the given text before dealing with appropriate critical questions. Following on from 1.4.2, this chapter explores Acts 17:16-34, when taken at face value, in the literary context of a) potential apologetic material recorded in Acts and b) a possible apologetic purpose of the Book of Acts. The issues related to the literary appropriateness, the historical authenticity and the theological adequacy of Acts 17:16-34 will be dealt with in chapter 3.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to assess a) whether Acts 17:16-34 can be shown to conform to a positive repeated pattern in Acts of apologetic convictions, approaches and arguments and b) whether this passage can be related – as apologetics – to Luke's authorial intent for the Book of Acts. *This chapter is thus a preliminary investigation into whether Luke intended to provide his readers with an apologetic model in Acts 17:16-34 by recording what Paul supposedly did in Athens (see 1.5.1).*

2.2 Acts 17:16-34 in the Context of the Practice of Apologetics

Recorded in Acts⁴²

2.2.1 Introducing apologetic words, settings and arguments in Acts

The wider cultural context of the Book of Acts is the Hellenistic pluralistic world of the first century where the Christian faith started as a minority faith. *The description in Acts of apostolic evangelism and church life clearly includes the practice of apologetics, since the truth claims of Christianity had to be justified in this pluralistic context over against relevant questions, objections and alternatives.* This section locates the essential apologetic material in Acts by focusing on the meaning and use of words related to apologetics (2.2.2), which indicate significant settings for apologetics (2.2.3). This leads on to a preliminary analysis of major apologetic arguments being used in these settings by the early church, as recorded in Acts (2.2.4). Finally, Acts 17:16-34 is preliminarily assessed in light of this recorded practice of apologetics in Acts at large, in order to determine whether the apologetic approach and argument of this specific passage, when taken at face value, can be shown to conform to a positive repeated pattern in Acts (2.2.5).

⁴² On the basis of the definition of apologetics presented in 1.2.2, the following analysis of key material in Acts treats the apologetic activity as distinct in principle from the actual preaching of the Gospel (*the kerygma*). This New Testament *kerygma* consists of two interlocking parts: a) The proclamation of the message of the salvation to the world, centred in the person and work of Jesus Christ; and b) The offer of this salvation to the world, personally appropriated through faith in Jesus Christ. The New Testament *apologetic*, on the other hand, as will be shown in the following, is concerned with responding to essential questions, objections and alternatives to this Gospel. In practice, however, the *kerygma* and the *apologia* are often intertwined. (See also Bruce 1977:21; McGrath, A. 1992a:49; and Mæland 1985:29.)

2.2.2 The Lucan use of key words relating to the practice of apologetics

There are a number of words used by Luke in Acts to indicate the practice of apologetics.

1. The basic word is ἀπολογία. It is being used in Acts both in the technical sense of a formal defence in the lawcourt (25:16; BAGD 2a), and in the general (more informal) sense of defending oneself or one's message before others (22:1; BAGD 1).⁴³

“The language of *apologia*, of charge and countercharge, is a prominent feature of the textual surface of Acts. This one book contains six out of ten occurrences in the NT of the verb *apologeomai* (two others being in Luke's Gospel), two out of eight NT occurrences of *apologia* and a high proportion of the NT usages of forensic terms like *kategoreo*.”⁴⁴

2. A cluster of words, also from a legal context, is coming from the μαρτυρ root. It indicates a witness "to facts and events on the one hand, and to truths vouched for on the other"⁴⁵: (1) μαρτυρεω (to be a witness, to testify)⁴⁶ and (2) μάρτυς (a witness).⁴⁷ The use of μάρτυς in 1:8 seems especially significant, since this verse could be seen as an outline of the content of the Book of Acts. The disciples are being told that their testimony to the historicity and the truth of the Gospel is: a) authorized by Jesus, to whom they are to

⁴³ See also ἀπολογέομαι (19:33; 24:10; 26:1,24) and 1.2.1.

⁴⁴ Alexander 1999:28.

⁴⁵ Green, M. 1970:83. As Trites points out, this witness to the claims of Christ was done in a context of hostility, contention and active hostility, which to a large extent accounts for the use of juridical terminology. (See Trites 1977:129-133.)

⁴⁶ Cf. 10:43; 14:3; 23:11; 26:5; 26:22.

⁴⁷ Cf. 1:8; 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 6:13; 10:39; 13:31. See also μαρτύρομαι, μαρτυρία, and μαρτύριον. Cf. also Bolt 1998:192-194.

bear witness ("my witnesses"); b) empowered by the Holy Spirit, whom they are to receive as a gift, and c) intended to be spread across geographical and cultural boundaries.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise to find apologetic themes recurring throughout the Book of Acts.

3. There are also words denoting the act of arguing and persuading. The main words being used in Acts are διαλέγομαι (meaning to 'speak', 'discuss' or 'debate')⁴⁸ and πείθω (meaning to 'persuade' or 'convince')⁴⁹. They indicate that the apostles were seeking to convince others of the truth of the Gospel, on the basis of public and private argument and debate. Other less frequent words in Acts indicating the same approach include the following: συμβιβάζω ('prove'; 9:22), συζητέω ('argue'; 9:29), παρατίθημι ('prove' or 'demonstrate'; 17:3), συμβάλλω ('debate'; 17:18) and διακατελέγχομαι ('refute'; 18:28).⁵⁰

The Lucan use of these words indicate both a) the centrality of apologetic material in the Book of Acts and b) some of the significant settings for apologetics in Acts.

2.2.3 The Lucan description of various settings for apologetics

The major settings for apologetics in the Lucan account of the early church include the following:

⁴⁸ 17:2; 18:4; 19:8.

⁴⁹ 17:4; 18:4; 19:8. See also Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 5:11 (cf. 3.3.3 and 5.4.2.10).

⁵⁰ See also the survey below on "apologetic dialogues" in Acts.

1. The judicial/forensic speeches⁵¹ indicate that the early church had to stand up in court - or other formal judicial settings - to defend itself (ἀπολογία) against legal accusations (κατηγορία). This is the formal judicial setting where the truth is being established by legal means or evidence. The apostles, however, seem to have used these legal occasions for evangelistic purposes.
2. The so-called missionary speeches⁵² show that the primary concern for the apostles was the communication of the Gospel. Their message⁵³ is characterized as a) 'good news' (εὐαγγέλιον / εὐαγγελίζω; e.g. 13:32), b) 'proclamation' (κήρυγμα/ κηρύσσω; e.g. 10:42), and c) 'witness' (μάρτυς/μαρτυρία/μαρτυρεῖν; e.g. 2:32).⁵⁴ The apologetic dimension of their message is seen most clearly in the third of these characteristics, where the apostles as *witnesses* both attested to the Gospel events as facts and vouched for the uniqueness and credibility of the Gospel.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Formal judicial speeches in Acts are recorded in 7:2-53 (Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin), 22:1-21 (Paul before the hostile crowd in the temple court), 23:1-6 (Paul before the Sanhedrin), 24:10-21 (Paul before the governor Felix), 25:8,10f (Paul before the governor Festus), 26:2-23 (Paul before king Herod Agrippa II), and 28:17-28 (Paul before the leading Jews of Rome). Some commentators would include Acts 17:16-34; see discussion in 3.4.2. For a discussion on the forensic speeches in Acts 24-26, see esp. Winter 1993b and Baasland 1994.

⁵² The 'missionary speeches' to *Jews* are recorded in 2:14-36 (Peter in Jerusalem at the day of Pentecost), 3:12-26 (Peter in Jerusalem after the healing of the crippled beggar), 4:8-12 (Peter before the Sanhedrin), 5:29-32 (Peter and the other apostles before the Sanhedrin), 10:34-43 (Peter at Cornelius' house in Caesarea), and 13:16-41 (Paul in Pisidian Antioch). The 'missionary speeches' to a *Gentile* or pagan audience are found in 14:15-17 (Paul to a crowd in Lystra), and 17:22-31 (Paul before the Areopagus in Athens).

⁵³ J. Stott succinctly summarizes the apostolic *kerygma* in Acts as "a fourfold message - two events (Christ's death and resurrection), as attested by two witnesses (prophets and apostles), on the basis of which God makes two promises (forgiveness and the Spirit), on two conditions (repentance and faith, with baptism)" (Stott 1990:81).

⁵⁴ See further Green, M. 1970:56-92.

⁵⁵ Trites summarizes his helpful and significant analysis of *the concept of witness in Acts* as

3. The Lucan description of apologetic challenges and responses includes various dialogues.⁵⁶ According to Luke, the apostle *Paul* was clearly involved in a series of significant apologetic dialogues, which included the following:

- (1) 9:22. Paul proved (συμβιβάζω) in the synagogue in Damascus that Jesus is the Christ.
- (2) 9:29. Paul talked (λάλέω) and argued (συζητέω) publicly in Jerusalem, especially with the Greek-speaking Jews.
- (3) 17:1-4. Paul discussed (διαλέγομαι), explained (διανοίγω; here: 'opened' their minds), and proved (παρατίθημι; BAGD 2c) in the synagogue in Thessalonica that Jesus is the Christ. (See further 2.2.4)
- (4) 17:17-18. Paul discussed (διαλέγομαι) both in the Athenian synagogue and the Athenian *agora*. The emphasis is on his debate (συμβάλλω) in the latter context with the Athenian philosophers.
- (5) 18:4. Paul discussed (διαλέγομαι) in the synagogue in Corinth, seeking to persuade (πείθω) both Jews and Greeks.
- (5) 19:8-9. Paul spoke boldly (παρρησιάζομαι) in Ephesus. First in the synagogue, arguing persuasively (διαλεγόμενος καὶ πείθων) about the kingdom of God, and then in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, where he conducted daily discussions (καθ' ἡμέραν διαλεγόμενος).
- (6) 24:25-26. In a judicial setting in Caesarea, Paul spoke on faith, righteousness, self-control and the future judgment in a dialogue (διαλέγομαι) with governor Felix.
- (7) 26:27-29. In a judicial setting in Caesarea, Paul argued in a dialogue with king Herod Agrippa II (and with governor Festus in the background) for the truth (ἀλήθεια) and the

follows: "For Luke the idea of witness is a living metaphor. Christians take Christ's side in real courts of law when his claims are in dispute and when their loyalty is tested by persecution. The witness is Messianic, juridical and religious. The fundamental witness to Christ includes two prominent witnesses in accordance with Deut. 19:15, namely, the witness of the apostles and the witness of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). The witness of the apostles guarantees both the historic facts of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the authoritative form of their transmission and communication. The witness of the Spirit makes possible the boldness of the apostles and other Christians, and enables them to perform signs and wonders which provide external confirmation of their testimony. The witness of both apostles and the Spirit is strengthened by a third witness, that of the Old Testament scriptures (10:43), which serves to confirm and corroborate the evidence presented by the other two sources. When taken together, Luke maintains, the witness of the apostles, the Spirit and the Old Testament constitute a compelling case for the claims of Christ as Lord and Messiah." (Trites 1977:153)

⁵⁶ It should be noticed that the dialogues mentioned below represent various formal settings.

reasonableness (σωφροσύνη) of the Christian Gospel, since it corresponds to history (οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἐν γωνίᾳ πεπραγμένον τοῦτο) and is consistent with the Old Testament prophets (τοῖς προφήταις). Agrippa admitted to the persuasive (πείθω) nature of Paul's arguments.⁵⁷

(8) 28:23-24. Paul explained/set forth (ἐκτίθημι) and declared (διαμαρτύρομαι) the Kingdom of God in a discussion with the leading Jews in Rome. He persuaded (πείθω) some of them of the truth of the Gospel of Christ. The basis of the discussion was the Old Testament Scriptures.

In addition to Paul, both *Stephen* in 6:8-10⁵⁸ and *Apollos* in 18:24-28⁵⁹ are described by Luke as being engaged in significant apologetic discussions with non-believers. There are also a number of recorded occasions where the apostle *Peter* seemed to have played a key role as an apologist in such discussions (see e.g. 4:20; 5:32).

The words used by Luke to describe these dialogues indicate the essential role of apologetics in these various settings. Thus, the practice of apologetics in the early church did not only take place in the form of public speeches, but also in the form of dialogues. The frequent dialogues in Acts also indicate the extent to which the early church was involved in public and private debate and argument.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ It has been suggested that had “Paul addressed himself most immediately to Festus, perhaps he would have used an approach like that in Acts 17:16-31” (Carson 1999, on Jan 26; see also 6.2.2.2).

⁵⁸ The word συζητέω (i.e. 'argue' or 'debate') is used of the discussion between Stephen and the Jews.

⁵⁹ The words used in 18:28 indicate the strong apologetic emphasis of the ministry of Apollos: He vigorously (εὐτόνως) refuted (διακατέλεγχομαι) the Jews publicly/ in public debate (δημοσίᾳ), showing (ἐπιδείκνυμι) from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

⁶⁰ See also Marshall 1992b.

4. In the Book of Acts, the recorded practice of Christian apologetics is not only for outsiders (i.e. non-Christians), but also seems to include apologetics for insiders (i.e. for the church, rationally to justify apostolic doctrine and to challenge Christian deviations/heresies).⁶¹ *This 'church setting', however, is irrelevant for the understanding of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics.*

*This brief survey of apologetic settings in Acts indicates that the early church considered critical arguments and logical persuasion not only legitimate but also essential in its witness to the world.*⁶²

2.2.4 The Lucan description of key apologetic arguments

The preceding survey of significant words and settings leads to a preliminary analysis of essential sequential arguments used in the apostolic apologetic according to Acts.

1. Arguing from Scripture (or special revelation) to the Gospel events (history)

The most common apologetic argument in Acts is clearly based on the OT Scriptures. It is being argued, for predominantly Jewish audiences, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the

⁶¹ It may be unusual to describe inner-church polemics in Acts in apologetics terms. A careful reading of 11:4-17 and 20:18ff might suggest, however, that these speeches could be described as having an apologetic emphasis. See esp. Bruce 1990a:38,430.

⁶² Strictly speaking, following the definition given in 1.2.2, the term *apologetics* should be limited to describe verbal arguments in public and private discourses (see 2.2.4). According to the New Testament, however, belief and behaviour must go together in commending the Christian faith (1 Pet. 3:13-17; 1 Thess. 2:1-14). The Christian fellowship (2:42-47; 13:1ff; 1 Jn. 4:12), the Christians' transformed characters (Paul in 22:2ff; 26:1ff; see also 1 Pet. 2:12,15), their power (3:1ff; 19:11f), and their martyrdoms (7:54ff; 12:2; see also 1 Pet. 2:19-21) seemed thus to have had a crucial "apologetic" impact on 'outsiders'. See also Craig 1994:299-302.

Christ. This argument from the OT Scriptures, arguing that "this Jesus...is the Christ" (17:3), is quite dominant in the Acts material.⁶³

Paul's arguments in Thessalonica are typical of this approach (cf. 17:1-4).⁶⁴ His arguments are based on the Scriptures (17:2), where he points to OT prophecies about Messiah (17:3a). At the same time, he proclaims the real, historical Jesus as the Christ (17:3b). The use of παρατίθημι ('place beside') indicates that Paul actually is setting the fulfilment (Jesus of history) alongside the predictions (Messiah or Christ of the OT). The structure of this argument in the 'synagogue setting' seems thus to be a move from the written special revelation (i.e. the OT) – as the shared common ground⁶⁵ – to the facticity, meaning and

⁶³ This approach is found at a number of occasions, as indicated by the following list of references: 2:30-36; 3:18-26; 5:42; 7:52-53; 8:35; 9:19-22; 10:43; 13:23,27,29,32-40; 17:1-4; 17:11; 18:4f; 18:28; 19:8; 26:22f, 27. See esp. Lindars 1961.

⁶⁴ Kemmler's analysis of these verses is crucial. He points out that the Lucan use of διελέξατο (17:2) here refers either to arguments on the basis of Scripture or to debate over the actual meaning of Old Testament texts, whereas the use of διανοίγων and παρατιθέμενος (17:3) indicate a process of opening the hearers' understanding followed by the setting forth of evidence in proper rhetorical form. (Kemmler 1975:35-42). Following on from Kemmler's analysis, Witherington makes two highly significant comments: "One of the significances of this sort of presentation of Paul's approach is that it suggests that it was believed that the gospel could be substantiated and be shown to be reasonable to both Jews and Gentiles (cf. below on Acts 17:16ff); at the same time it was assumed that the gospel should be responded to freely on the basis of the appeal to the mind in addition to the pull of the *pathos* inherent in the message. Proclaiming the gospel was not to be seen as an attempt to dupe an unsuspecting public and suck them in by mere eloquence without rational substance." (Witherington 1998:506; see also further Kemmler 1975:72-75.)

⁶⁵ The question of 'common ground' refers to the issue "whether there is any area of neutral evidence or starting point at which Christian and non-Christian can meet" (Geisler 1999:157).

significance of the Resurrection.⁶⁶ This was done in order to persuade (πείθω, 17:4) listeners with a Jewish background of the truth of the Gospel.

2. Arguing from general revelation⁶⁷ to the Resurrection (in history)

The speeches to a Gentile audience (in Lystra and Athens)⁶⁸ seem to indicate a different approach altogether. In these Gentile contexts, no OT passage is quoted or referred to openly. Luke describes Paul as using his knowledge of the religious and cultural background of Lystra and Athens in order to establish vital points of contact (14:15-17; 17:22-23, 28). Both speeches are concerned with the clarification of essential misunderstandings (14:11; 17:18) by focusing mainly on who God really is: the Creator, the Sustainer and the Judge (14:15-17; 17:24-31). Challenging idolatry also seems essential to this approach (14:15; 17:29-30).

Pagans are held accountable for their belief and behaviour, since the apostles seem to claim that there is “sufficient knowledge of God available to them to ensure their responsibility”⁶⁹. The structure of this argument in the non-Jewish setting seems thus to be

⁶⁶ Bruce observes that in “the proclamation of the apostles the argument from prophecy and the argument from miracle coincided and culminated in the resurrection of Jesus.” (Bruce 1977:17)

⁶⁷ For the purpose of this thesis, the following distinction is presupposed: “General revelation is the traits of the author reflected in his product, the fingerprint of the potter in the clay, so to speak, whereas the arguments of natural theology are the human products of men’s rational reflection upon general revelation.” (Craig in Cowan 2000:39)

⁶⁸ See further discussion in 3.5.2.

⁶⁹ Droge 1992:306-307, where he is referring to Rom. 1:18ff.

a move from God's general revelation in creation and human history⁷⁰ – as the shared common ground - to the facticity, meaning and significance of the Resurrection.

3. Arguing for the credibility and significance of the the historical resurrection of Jesus

As suggested above, the arguments from Scripture and from creation both move towards the facticity, meaning and significance of the Resurrection. The focus in the apostolic apologetic is usually on the historical fact of the Resurrection (ἀνάστασις) of Jesus, the crucial role of the apostles as eyewitnesses and the significance of this key event. This argument seems thus to occur everywhere⁷¹ - both in formal and informal settings, and both in relation to Jews and Gentiles. "Throughout the book of Acts, the apostolic preaching again and again centers the truth of the Christian faith on the historical fact of the resurrection of Christ."⁷²

The historical evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus is claimed to be open to investigation, since "it was not done in a corner" (26:26). This is underlined by expressions like "he gave many convincing proofs that he was alive" (1:3f), where "the language used (τεκμήριον)

⁷⁰ This approach seems to a certain extent to be paralleled in 1 Thess. 1:9-10, Rom. 1:18ff and Rom. 2:14-16; see further discussion in 3.3.3. Referring to Lk. 11:49, Acts 17:28, 1 Cor. 15:33, Tit. 1:12, 2 Pet. 2:22 and Jude 14f, Longenecker points out that it seemed to be a common strategy in the New Testament to be "prepared to employ not only biblical citations but also, to a limited extent, statements of truth found outside the canon, whether of Jewish, pagan or uncertain origin" (Longenecker 1995:210).

⁷¹ See esp. 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:20; 4:33; 5:32; 10:40-41; 13:30f; 17:18, 31; 26:23. The only exception is the actual Lystra speech (14:15-17), though 14:6f points out that the "good news" indeed was preached (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι) - and probably also argued for - also in that area.

⁷² Montgomery 1975:168.

suggests the convincing and decisive nature of the proof that was offered." ⁷³ The fact of the Resurrection of Jesus is supposed to have vindicated Jesus as "both Lord and Christ" (2:36), "the Servant" (3:26), "the capstone" (4:11), and as "judge of the living and the dead" (10:43, cf. 17:31). The argument, then, has as its focus the facticity, meaning and significance of the Resurrection of Jesus.

4. Arguing for conversion: 'The epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith

The argument for the facticity, meaning and significance of the Resurrection seems to have constituted the basis for an emphasis on conversion in the apostolic message.⁷⁴ Paul's summary of his overall witness in his speech to the Ephesian Elders in Miletus indicates the centrality of conversion: "I have declared (διαμαρτύρομαι⁷⁵) to both Jew and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance (μετάνοια) and have faith in our Lord Jesus." (20:21) Despite its inherent attractiveness, this Christian *kerygma* was controversial in the first century, as Green emphasizes:

"Conversion, then, in our sense of an exclusive change of faith, of ethic and of cult, was indeed utterly foreign to the mentality of the Graeco-Roman world... It is at this point that the uniqueness of Christian conversion stands

⁷³ Marshall 1992c:42. See also 1 Cor.15:4-20. Following Trites' analysis of Acts, Craig points out that "the operative question for Luke is, On what grounds or evidence can people have faith? Hence he put the greatest emphasis on the factual content of preaching." (Craig 1998a:175; see Trites 1977:128-153.)

⁷⁴ See esp. the use of μετανοέω in 2:38; 3:19 and 17:30.

⁷⁵ Trites observes that in Acts "διαμαρτύρομαι refers to the solemn attestation of the apostolic message with a view to winning converts (e.g. 2:40; 8:25; 18:5; 20:24). The verb is used of Christian testimony before both Jews and Greeks (e.g. 10:42; 20:21; 23:11; 28:23), and of the Holy Spirit's testimony (20:23; cf. 21:4,11)." (Trites 1977:74) See also above under 2.2.2 on μαρτυρέω.

out. They called on Jews as well as Gentiles to put their faith in God's Messiah and join the company of his people. For the Gentile this would be conversion *to* a new faith; for the Jew it would be, in an important sense, conversion *within* the faith in which he had been nourished, and of which Christ was the summit and goal. But the shock would be as great for the Jew, or even greater, than for the Gentile. Both would have to be baptized into the Church of the Messiah. ... A more humbling renunciation of all privilege, all acquired and inherited merit and standing before God, could not be imagined. The *skandalon* of conversion to Christianity was absolute."⁷⁶

There was thus a need for an apologetic argument in order to establish the validity of this Christian truth claim over against relevant questions, objections and alternatives. The basis for this argument is both the unique, authoritative status of Jesus Christ as Lord (see e.g. 2:36-38; 4:12; 5:30-32; 10:42-43; 17:7; and 17:30-31 with its stress on πίστις⁷⁷) and the reality of the one, true God (cf. 14:15; 17:24-30). The aim of this argument, then, is to justify the stress on conversion as a natural consequence of 'the epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith. The intention was thus to challenge unbelief/alternative beliefs and to encourage the adoption of the Christian faith.

These four key arguments should be seen as complementary and interlocking in the Lucan account. In the Jewish context, truth was established by an appeal to the Jewish

⁷⁶ Green, M. 1970:176-177. It seems, though, that Green overstates the case when he claims that the concept of conversion was "*utterly* foreign to the mentality of the Graeco-Roman world" (*italics added*). In the pluralistic context of the first century various religions and cults challenged people to change their belief and behaviour and to embrace a new philosophy of life. It is true, however, that the nature of conversion to Christianity (or to Judaism) was uniquely radical since it involved "a rejection of the pluralistic perception of divinity present in an epiphany or in any idol" (Winter 1991:129). See also Nock 1972:77-137 on the crucial difference between the 'adhesion' to the mystery religions and the 'conversion' to Christianity (where conversion to the Christian faith also involved the renunciation of previous religious practices).

⁷⁷ See further the exegetical comments on 17:31 in 4.4.3.

Scriptures (e.g. as in Jerusalem and Thessalonica, cf. 2:14-36 and 17:1-4), whereas in the non-Jewish context, truth had to be established without explicit reference to the OT Scriptures as the common ground (as in Lystra and Athens, cf. 14:15-17 and 17:22-31). Green makes the plausible suggestion that there are two major and parallel approaches in Acts: “Jews were approached via the Old Testament; pagans, it seems, through the light of natural revelation, leading on to Christ.”⁷⁸ Following on from this dual approach, both Jews and Greeks were confronted with arguments for the truth of the Gospel events and for ‘the epistemic obligation’ of the Christian faith. The subsequent extensive treatment of the apologetic arguments in Acts 17:16-34 in chapters 3 - 5 at large – and specifically in 5.4 - will provide a test of the validity of this preliminary analysis.

2.2.5 Acts 17:16-34 in the context of the practice of apologetics recorded in Acts

The practice of apologetics plays a significant role in the Lucan account of apostolic evangelism and church life in Acts. The preceding analysis of this material has yielded some important insights about Acts 17:16-34: a) Some significant *words* related to the practice of apologetics are used in the passage⁷⁹, especially διαλέγομαι (17:17) and συμβάλλω (17:18); b) The apologetic *settings* described in the passage are public dialogues in the synagogue and the *agora* (17:17-18), and a public 'missionary speech' to Gentiles (17:22-31); c) The recorded *arguments* in the passage are based on God as Creator

⁷⁸ Green, M. 1970:151-152; see also Squires 1998:25.

⁷⁹ See also the comments on πίστιν παρέχω (17:31) in 4.4.3.

and Sustainer (17:24-29) and on the Resurrection (17:18, 31) in order to argue for 'the epistemic obligation' of (i.e. conversion to) the Christian faith (17:29-30).

Taken at face value, then, *Acts 17:16-34 clearly seems to fit a positive repeated pattern in Acts* of key apologetic approaches and arguments, "that are endorsed and replicated in the lives of various of the persons who seem to be seen as examples in Acts."⁸⁰ If this positive pattern (as argued in 1.4.2) could be related to Luke's authorial intent, such a pattern should be seen as a normative, recommended or repeatable apologetic model. This leads naturally to the question of Luke's purpose with Acts.

2.3 Acts 17:16-34 in the Context of an Apologetic Purpose of Acts

2.3.1 A threefold purpose of Acts: Acts as history, theology and apologetics

The question of the purpose of Acts must be seen in the wider context of Luke-Acts. Many contemporary NT scholars appropriately treat the third Gospel and the Book of Acts as a unity, forming "two parts of one work, conceived in its final form as a unity, whether or not the original composition of the Gospel took place independently of the plan to produce the two-part work."⁸¹ This would imply that Luke-Acts, on the basis of the introductory passages in Lk 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-5, should be seen as having the same

⁸⁰ Witherington 1998:102.

⁸¹ Marshall 1993:182. Witherington observes accordingly. that most contemporary scholars "in fact would argue for the theological and thematic similarity and unity of the two volumes" (Witherington 1998:5).

author⁸², the same recipient ("Theophilus"), and a complementary content (describing the life of Jesus and of the early church).

The purpose of Acts is a key topic in the current discussion on Acts.⁸³ Powell suggests that "the most important theories regarding the purpose of Acts may be grouped into six categories: irenic, polemical, apologetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and theological"⁸⁴. It is outside the focus of this thesis to evaluate these theories, but it is appropriate to offer some general comments. *First*, the possibility of *complementary purposes* should not be ruled out. It seems possible – and even probable - that Luke had more than one purpose in mind when writing Acts.⁸⁵ *Secondly*, as Peterson points out, "a growing number of scholars propose that the book of Acts is *a work of edification for Christians*".⁸⁶ This is, at least partly, due to the plausible observation that "the overall shape of Luke-Acts, its contents,

⁸² Carson, Moo and Morris are representative of a broad conservative tradition when they claim that there is "no convincing reason to deny that the author of Acts was a companion of Paul. That he was his companion is the natural implication of the 'we' passages. That this companion was none other than Luke 'the beloved physician' is the unanimous opinion of the early church. We have good reason, then, to conclude that Luke was the author of Acts." (Carson et al 1992:190; see also e.g. Guthrie 1970:99-109; Marshall 1980:44-46; Hemer 1989a:308-410; and Bruce 1990a:1-9. *In this chapter, however, 'Luke' simply refers to the author of Luke-Acts, without necessarily closing the authorship issue.*

⁸³ Helpful introductions to key areas of contemporary scholarly discussion on Acts are provided in Powell 1991, Marshall 1992a, Liefeld 1995, and Green, J. 1997.

⁸⁴ Powell 1991:13. Powell uses 'apologetic' in the narrower sense of a defence over against (Roman and Jewish) accusations. This illustrates the fact that many New Testament scholars seem to use this term narrowly about strictly *forensic defences* or exclusively about the *defence over against (external) accusations and objections*. The definition assumed in 1.2.2, however, seems much more plausible.

⁸⁵ Witherington claims accordingly that Luke's "accomplishments in writing the Acts of the Apostles are numerous. In a single stroke he provided early Christianity with a sense of definition, identity and legitimization, things Theophilus presumably needed reassurance or more certainty about" (Witherington 1998:76).

⁸⁶ Peterson 1998a:534 (*italics added*).

and narrative style suggest that it was addressed to a Christian audience, rather than to outsiders".⁸⁷ *Thirdly*, Acts - as a work of edification for Christians⁸⁸ - could plausibly be seen as having *a threefold purpose: historical, theological and apologetic*. This is a more integrative approach, where the manifold purpose of Acts is expressed on (at least) three levels, i.e. as history, theology and apologetics:

1. Acts has undoubtedly a basic historical purpose. Luke writes as a Christian historian, presenting an account of the origins of Christianity to his Christian narratees. Marshall observes accordingly, that Luke-Acts "demonstrates affinities both to historical monographs and to biographies, but it appears to represent a new type of work, of which it is the only example, in which under the shape of a 'scientific treatise' Luke has produced a work which deals with 'the beginnings of Christianity'"⁸⁹. Guthrie, Bruce, and Hemer are other significant examples of scholars who emphasize the basic historiographical nature and purpose of Acts.⁹⁰

2. The selection of historical material in Acts served Luke's theological purpose. In the Book of Acts (which appropriately has been described as "The Continuing Words and

⁸⁷ Peterson 1998a:533.

⁸⁸ Peterson observes accordingly that Luke-Acts "were written primarily as a work of edification for a Christian audience, rather than as a direct apology for unbelievers" (Peterson 1993:104).

⁸⁹ Marshall 1993:180.

⁹⁰ See e.g. Guthrie 1970:349; Hemer 1989a; and Bruce 1990a:22. It should be pointed out that even though the questions of historiography and historicity are closely related, they are not identical. See further 3.3.

Deeds of Jesus by his Spirit through his Apostles"⁹¹), Luke writes as a theologian-evangelist about such key theological themes as divine purposes, christology, salvation, promise-fulfilment, and the Holy Spirit.⁹² It could thus be argued that the theology of Acts is theocentric, christocentric and pneumocentric.⁹³

3. As 'theological history', the Book of Acts could plausibly be seen as an apologetic book for Christians⁹⁴, written (as will be argued in the following) *both* in order to confirm the validity of key Christian truth claims *and* to provide apologetic tools and models for relating to outsiders.⁹⁵

2.3.2 Acts as Lucan apologetics (1): Providing confirmation for insiders

The stated intention in Luke-Acts is to show Theophilus (and possibly also other recipients) "the certainty (ἀσφάλεια) of the things you have been taught" (Lk 1:4). The basis for this certainty is, among other things, that Jesus after the Resurrection "gave many convincing proofs (τεκμήριον) that he was alive" (Acts 1:3). To argue for the certainty and validity of the Christian faith – in the one, true God and in Jesus Christ - seems thus to

⁹¹ Stott 1990:34.

⁹² There is a vast literature on the theology of Acts. See the surveys in: Powell 1991:38-57; Marshall 1992a:47-63; and Liefeld 1995:79-98. Cf. also Jervell 1996.

⁹³ Powell 1991:57; see also Halse 1997.

⁹⁴ Alexander points out that there are a number of apologetic readings of Acts among the commentators. She describes these as: a) Acts as internal inner-church polemic, b) Acts as sectarian self-defence over against Judaism, c) Acts as religious propaganda over against Greeks, d) Acts as political self-defence over against Rome, e) Acts as a legitimating document for Christians. (See Alexander 1999:16-19.) *These alternatives, however, have not convinced the present author.*

⁹⁵ On the relevance of this dual purpose of Acts to the discussion in chapter 6, see Larkin

have been the primary apologetic purpose or function of Luke-Acts. This implies that Luke's purpose was to "give the original readers confidence that the Christian message which they have heard and accepted is valid and true - both as a record of what has happened and in its theological significance".⁹⁶ We may add that confirmation of the truth of the Gospel for Christian converts/believers is mentioned as a major and unifying purpose of Acts by a significant number of scholars.⁹⁷

Through his account of apologetic practice (see 2.2), Luke shows the Christian converts that the Christian faith is valid and makes sense over against relevant questions, objections and alternatives. Luke's apologetic in Acts for Christian believers includes an account of at least three different challenges and responses. This is well expressed by Bruce:

"Of three main types of Christian apologetic in the second century Luke provides first-century prototypes: apologetic in relation to pagan religion (Christianity is true; paganism is false); apologetic in relation to Judaism (Christianity represents the fulfillment of true Judaism); apologetic in relation to the political authorities (Christianity is innocent of any offence against Roman law)." ⁹⁸

These apologetic challenges and responses seem to have been recorded with a dual intention. *First*, as this section has argued, Luke's intention was to confirm the truth-value

2000.

⁹⁶ Marshall 1992a:45. See also Bartchy 1995 for a slightly different approach.

⁹⁷ This is the observation in e.g. Marshall 1992a:38-46; Marshall 1992c:158; Carson et al 1992:198; and Peterson 1993:102-104. Alexander, however, seems largely to neglect this essential element in her (otherwise largely valuable) discussion on Acts as an apologetic text (see Alexander 1999).

of the faith of the Christian converts and thus to provide them with a sense of definition, identity and legitimization over against alternative beliefs.⁹⁹ The preface to Acts indicates that Theophilus (and other recipients) needed this assurance in a challenging pluralistic context. *Secondly*, (which will be argued in the following) Luke's intention was to enable the church to reach out in apologetics and relate meaningfully to relevant questions, objections and alternatives.

2.3.3 Acts as Lucan apologetics (2): Providing tools and models for relating to outsiders

Luke offers examples and precedents of apostolic apologetic to his Christian readers to provide them with effective apologetic tools and models for relating to non-Christians.¹⁰⁰

1. Apologetic tools in Acts for relating to the Roman authorities

When commentators write about the Book of Acts as apologetics, most commonly the relationship to the Roman authorities is in view.¹⁰¹ A prominent exponent for this view on the purpose of Acts is F. F. Bruce. He suggests that both parts of Luke's history "have a strong apologetic emphasis; if in the first part he rebuts the charge that Jesus was personally a rebel against Rome, in the second part he defends the Christian movement in

⁹⁸ Bruce 1990b:175.

⁹⁹ Cf. also Skarsaune 1993.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. Sterling 1992:386 and Alexander 1999:25. Peterson points out that "although the primary audience for which Luke writes is the Christian community, his apologetic method offered Christians a 'missionary tool', to assist them in evangelism" (Peterson 1993:103).

¹⁰¹ See e.g. Powell 1991:15-16; Carson et al 1992:197; and Alexander 1999:18-19.

general against the accusation of provoking disorder wherever it spread”¹⁰². It is clearly the case throughout Acts, that Luke establishes the law-abiding character of Christianity by introducing a variety of officials acquitting Paul (and the others) of the legal charges that are being brought against them.¹⁰³ The fact that Paul made an appeal to Caesar¹⁰⁴, exercising his privilege as a Roman citizen, underlines this aspect of Acts. Thus, the Book of Acts describes the Christians as law-abiding subjects of the emperor,¹⁰⁵ as long as this does not hinder their ultimate loyalty to Christ as Lord.¹⁰⁶

The question, however, is why this pattern is present in Acts. It seems improbable that Acts was written as a court brief with Paul's trial in Rome in mind, since "Acts contains so much else that is concerned with different interests ... [and] there is far too much 'in house' material for Christians to make this at all plausible".¹⁰⁷ Luke's intention was rather to provide the Christians, when faced with accusations of being subversive and creating disorder, with arguments and precedents showing that Christianity was harmless, innocent and law-abiding.¹⁰⁸

2. Apologetic tools in Acts for relating to Judaism

The first Christians had to face religious accusations from the Jews. Luke seems to have

¹⁰² Bruce 1977:57.

¹⁰³ See 13:7,12; 16:37ff; 18:12ff; 19:31,35ff; 24:1-26,32; 28:30f.

¹⁰⁴ See 25:10-12; 25:21; 25:25-27; 26:30-32.

¹⁰⁵ See 13:7,12; 16:37ff; 18:12ff; 19:31,35ff; 28:30f.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. 4:19; 5:29.

¹⁰⁷ Marshall 1992a:33. It is quite clear, though, that the trials and defences of Paul were significant for Luke's purposes for Acts, since they occupy almost one-fourth of the whole book.

¹⁰⁸ See also Alexander 1999:33-38.

recorded Stephen's speech (7:2-53) as an apologetic model for how to respond to such accusations,¹⁰⁹ whereas the recorded arguments in synagogue (and other Jewish) settings for Jesus as the promised Messiah (see 2.2.3) seem to have been intended as the corresponding positive model for relating to Judaism.¹¹⁰ One of the key examples of such models is Acts 26:1-29.¹¹¹

Acts 26:1-29 presents Paul in a largely Jewish setting in Caesarea, where he delivers a formal forensic *apologia* before the Jewish king Herod Agrippa II. The Pauline defence speech (26:1-23) - where he defends himself over against Jewish accusations (26:2,7) - has been characterized as "primarily a Jewish speech in which Paul presents his testimony or witness to Agrippa"¹¹². The apostle is finally interrupted in his speech (26:24).

Straight after the speech, there follows a significant apologetic interaction with the Jewish king Agrippa and the Roman governor Festus (26:25-29). This means a change from a predominantly Jewish setting (in the speech) to a 'mixed' setting (in the interaction). Paul claims in this dialogue - over against an objection from the governor¹¹³ - that the Christian

¹⁰⁹ Bruce observes that Stephen's defence is no forensic defence, but "rather an apology in the sense that it is a reasoned defence of the position which he had maintained in the Hellenistic synagogue which he attended in Jerusalem, and it may be regarded as a sample of Christian Hellenistic apologetic against Jewish objections to the gospel" (Bruce 1977:24).

¹¹⁰ It has also been suggested that Acts is directed to Jewish Christians in Rome and has as one of its purposes an apology for the apostle Paul. (See e.g. Carson et al 1992:197-198 and Alexander 1999:43-44.) Acts, however, seems to be less of an "in house" argument for Paul than an argument (intended for Christians) for the validity of the Christian faith over against Judaism and paganism.

¹¹¹ See Malherbe 1989.

¹¹² Witherington 1998:735.

¹¹³ Luke seems to have given us "a portrait of a down-to-earth Roman not willing to believe anything esoteric that goes beyond his view of common sense" (Witherington 1998:749).

Gospel should be accepted as true, because it is coherent and makes sense intellectually (26:25), corresponds to the known facts of history (26:26¹¹⁴) and prophecy (26:27), and can transform people's lives (26:29).

Here, Luke seems to describe Paul as making an implicit use of key criteria of truth (see 1.2.2): consistency and coherence, correspondence with reality, and pragmatic relevance or adequacy.¹¹⁵ Luke's intention with these verses seems to have been to provide his Christian readers, whether they were facing Roman, Jewish or pagan challenges, with key arguments for the truth of the Gospel. Thus, the description of this 'mixed setting' in Acts 26:25ff leads naturally to a description of responses to the pagan challenges.

3. Apologetic tools in Acts for relating to paganism

The first Christians lived in the Hellenistic pluralistic world with its variety of philosophical and religious beliefs. Luke's account in Acts of apostolic witness includes encounters with various pagan beliefs, especially in 16:6-19:20. *The only developed model in Acts of apologetics to pagans, however, seems to be Acts 17:16-34.*

¹¹⁴ The expression "not in a corner" (οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐν γωνίᾳ πεπραγμένον τοῦτο) in 26:26 refers both to Paul's claim a) to be "a responsible philosopher... who takes part in public life and human affairs" and b) that Christianity (the Gospel events, the message and the new Christian church) "is a public phenomenon subject to public scrutiny" (Witherington 1998:749-750). See also Malherbe 1989:154-157.

¹¹⁵ Alexander observes that Paul's appeal is "addressed specifically and very directly to a leading, highly placed patron of Diaspora Judaism, and its object is not to exonerate Paul but to bring the hearer – any hearer – to share his religious world-view" (Alexander 1999:38).

Acts 17:16-34 presents Paul in a largely non-Jewish setting in Athens, where his proclamation of the Gospel was followed by initial apologetic discussions in the synagogue (with Jews and 'godfearers') and in the *agora* (with casual Greek bypassers and philosophers). This resulted in an opportunity to deliver what is usually described as a 'missionary speech' before the Areopagus Council.

The apologetic intention of this Areopagus Speech, when taken at face value, seems to have been to seek to justify the Christian beliefs in the one, true God and in the Gospel of Jesus, over against specific Athenian questions, objections and alternatives. Luke's intention with this passage seems thus to have been to provide his Christian readers with key apologetic approaches and arguments in a pagan setting.

2.3.4 Acts 17:16-34 in the context of an apologetic purpose of Acts

The preceding analysis has shown that Luke in the Book of Acts argues for the historical and theological truth of the Christian Gospel for Christian converts. This is done *both* to confirm the truth-value of their faith *and* to give them tools and models for their own apologetic ministry. The recorded positive pattern of key apologetic approaches and arguments provided the Christian believers with such tools and models. *This section (2.3) has thus indicated that Acts 17:16-34 – if seen as one such model – can be related to Luke's apologetic purpose of Acts.*

2.4 Preliminary Conclusions

The preliminary analysis in this chapter leads to some significant observations about Acts 17:16-34 in the context of Acts as apologetics:

- a) Acts 17:16-34 contains explicit apologetic material. The Lucan narrative seems to draw attention both to the Athenian questions, objections and alternatives and to Paul's responses as being significant. *This chapter has thus confirmed the legitimacy of the focus on this passage.*
- b) Taken at face value, Acts 17:16-34 seems to fit the wider Lucan description in Acts of the apologetic practice of the early church, in terms of convictions, settings and arguments. *Some essential elements of a positive repeated apologetic pattern in Acts have been identified:* (1) There seems to be key theological convictions of the truth and uniqueness of the Christian faith as an underlying basis for the recorded apologetic. (2) There seems to be an appreciation in the recorded apologetic both of differences between various settings and of the corresponding need to understand relevant questions, objections and alternatives in these settings. (3) There seems to be a common argumentative structure in the recorded apologetic, starting from an identified common ground (whether Scripture or creation), focusing on the credibility of the Resurrection, and moving towards the challenge of 'the epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith.
- c) An understanding of Acts as apologetics, written for Christians with the dual intention to provide them both with confirmation of the truth of their Christian faith and with

apologetic tools and models for reaching outsiders, seems plausible and gives *a credible literary context for seeing Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model.*

These three significant observations lead to the preliminary conclusion that Acts 17:16-34 seems to be a Lucan apologetic model (see 1.5.1). It remains to see whether the critical study in the subsequent chapters will validate this preliminary analysis.

3. EVALUATING THE CONTEMPORARY EXEGETICAL DISCUSSION OF ACTS 17:16-34

Outline:

3.1 Introducing the Chapter

3.2 Background, Contributors and Topics

3.3 The Question of the Authenticity of the Account: Setting, Speech and Speaker

3.4 The Question of the Athenian Context: Location, Occasion, Religion and Philosophy

3.5 The Question of Paul as Public Speaker in Athens: Orator and Missionary

3.6 Conclusions

3.1 Introducing the Chapter

The aim of this chapter is to give an essential critical overview of the current state of the interpretation of Acts 17:16-34, which is a key pericope in Acts scholarship. The present chapter forms the basis for the subsequent exposition, assessment and application of the text in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

The wealth of critical material dealing with this passage¹¹⁶ makes it imperative for the purpose of this thesis to select the most significant contemporary material. The intention of the present chapter, then, is to evaluate key contributions in the contemporary exegetical discussion on Acts 17:16-34, with specific reference to the Scandinavian and the English-speaking scene. This will be done by defining the 'contemporary' debate (3.2) and discussing the key issues involved (3.3-5). The relevance and validity of the critical conclusions (3.6) will be shown in the subsequent exposition of the passage in chapter 4.

3.2 Background, Contributors and Topics

3.2.1 *Setting the scene*

Acts 17:16-34 has been a focus of attention in contemporary New Testament scholarship in general and in Acts scholarship specifically. It has in fact "attracted more scholarly attention than any other passage in Acts".¹¹⁷ The critical discussion in this chapter is limited to the post 1960-period, since this appears to be a natural starting-point for the 'contemporary' discussion, given the following reasons:

1. By that time, the earlier commentators - especially E. Norden (1913), A. Schweitzer

¹¹⁶ Barnes notes that "the bibliography compiled by A.J. and M.B. Mattill [*A Classified Bibliography of Literature on the Acts of the Apostles (New Testament Tools and Studies*, vii [1966], pp.430-9, nos 6029-6179] (which goes down to 1961) catalogues more than 150 studies devoted to Acts 17:16-34 alone, excluding all discussions of the passage in works of wider compass". (Barnes 1969:407) This implies that the literature available on this speech is immense. More recent selected bibliographies are found in e.g. Weiser 1985:453-455 and Bruce 1990a:379-380.

(1931), M. Dibelius (1939), N. Stonehouse (1949), M. Pohlenz (1949), and B. Gärtner (1955) - had laid the foundations for the subsequent debate by their crucial, but to a large extent conflicting, contributions. The most significant of these early contributors were Martin Dibelius and Bertil Gärtner.

In 1939, Martin Dibelius' essay *Paulus auf dem Areopag* appeared. In this influential study, he argues that both the setting (on the hill) and the speech itself largely are the free literary compositions of the author in order to provide his contemporaries with a model for preaching to pagans. Dibelius claims that the Lucan Paul's speech is "a hellenistic speech about the true knowledge of God"¹¹⁷. The speech consists of a synthesis "of rational hellenism and the Christian missionary message"¹¹⁸. Therefore, Dibelius argues, the speech is contrary to Old Testament thought and totally foreign to the rest of the New Testament.

Bertil Gärtner's monograph on Acts 17:16-34 from 1955, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, was a direct response to Dibelius, where Gärtner argued for the historical authenticity and the theological adequacy of the speech.¹²⁰ According to Gärtner, the historical setting for the Areopagus Speech was an informal court session. Contrary to Dibelius, Gärtner argues,

¹¹⁷ Witherington 1998:511.

¹¹⁸ Dibelius 1956:57.

¹¹⁹ Dibelius 1956:75.

¹²⁰ N. Stonehouse had already addressed the issues raised by Dibelius in a seminal essay in 1949 (Stonehouse 1949), but Gärtner's treatment is much more comprehensive. "nearly 250 pages of tightly packed arguments" (Gasque 1975:213).

“(i) that the background to the speech is to be found rather in Hebrew than in Greek thought, and especially in the Old Testament; (ii) that it has parallels in the apologetic preaching of Hellenistic Judaism; and (iii) that it is genuinely Pauline in the sense that its main features reflect Paul’s thought in his letters, although of course Luke has abbreviated it and put it into its present literary form”.¹²¹

Thus understood, the Areopagus Speech is not “a deliberate assimilation of current philosophy” (as Dibelius had argued), but “a clear-headed adaptation to the listeners’ phraseology that does not overshadow the specifically Christian content”¹²². Following on from the fundamental Dibelius/Gärtner-debate, many contemporary contributors have, broadly speaking, focused on a) the question of *the authenticity of Luke’s account*, b) the proper understanding of *the ancient Athenian context*, and on c) evaluating *the Lucan Paul’s encounter with Athens*.¹²³

2. In 1961, J.N. Sevenster published his seminal study *Paul and Seneca*, where he explored theological similarities and differences between Paul and the contemporary Stoic philosopher. Even though admitting a clear resemblance between the apostle and Seneca in their views on divine providence, Sevenster concludes that “Seneca is in the last resort not serious when he speaks of the personal god”¹²⁴. The theological relationship between Paul and the natural theology of Stoicism (as well as of Epicureanism) remains a crucial topic for the proper understanding of Acts 17.

¹²¹ This succinct summary of Gärtner’s main argument is found in Stott 1990:288-289. Gasque observes: “Although not all will be convinced by the arguments brought forward by Gärtner, he has presented a case which cannot (or, at least, should not) be ignored”. (Gasque 1975:214)

¹²² Gärtner 1955:71.

¹²³ See e.g. Powell 1991:30-32,91-94,99 and Marshall 1980:282-283.

¹²⁴ Sevenster 1961:37; cf. Nash 1992:67-79 and Paige 1993:717. Gibson points out in a recent article, that in “the quarter of the century since Sevenster, a considerable volume of research has

3. In the same year, U. Wilckens' influential monograph *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte* appeared. This study broke new ground, by focusing on the significance of the *Form-und Traditions-geschichtliche* questions for the proper understanding of any of the 'missionary speeches' in Acts, including the Areopagus Speech. Wilckens claimed that both Paul in 1 Thess. 1:9-10 and Luke in Acts 17:22-31 are reflecting a widespread common pattern of early Christian preaching to Gentiles.¹²⁵ Such literary and historical questions continue to be significant in the contemporary debate.

Taken together, these three key factors (see 1-3 above) seem to justify the selection of 1960/1961 as a natural starting-point for the contemporary discussion.

3.2.2 Major contemporary contributors

Many contributions to the understanding of Acts 17:16-34 have been published since 1960/1961. This includes general commentaries on Acts by English, German and Scandinavian scholars,¹²⁶ specific articles and monographs dealing with the Areopagus Speech¹²⁷, as well as more general works that are especially relevant.¹²⁸

sought to place Paul more precisely within his Hellenistic context" (Gibson 2000:313).

¹²⁵ Wilckens 1961:81-88.

¹²⁶ See Barrett 1998; Bruce 1988; Bruce 1990a; Conzelmann 1987; Gempf 1994; Gooding 1990; Haenchen 1977; Hanson 1967; Jervell 1998; Keener 1993; Krodel 1986; Larsson 1987; Lenski 1961; Longenecker 1981; Lüdemann 1989; Lövestam 1988; Marshall 1980; Pesch 1986; Roloff 1981; Schneider, G. 1982; Stott 1990; Weiser 1985; and Witherington 1998.

¹²⁷ See esp. the following: Adams 1992; Bailey, R. 1990; Balch 1990; Barnes 1969; Barrett 1974; Bruce 1980; Conzelmann 1968; Cook 1995a; Croy 1997; Fudge 1971; Gempf 1993a; Gill, D. 1999; Gill, D.W. 1994a; Given 1995; Given 1996; Hansen 1998; Hemer 1974; Hemer 1989b;

This contemporary exegetical discussion tends to polarize into two major alternative approaches. The dominant German exegetical tradition – following the form criticism of M. Dibelius and the redaction criticism of H. Conzelmann and E. Haenchen and still prominent in some of the more recent commentaries¹²⁹ – tends to regard the material in Acts 17:16-34 as - more or less - a Lucan invention. There are, however, other recent German studies¹³⁰, which are more positive to the authenticity of Luke's account. The dominant British exegetical tradition¹³¹, on the other hand, following the historical and archaeological studies by W. Ramsey and A. N. Sherwin-White and largely identifying with the theological analysis by Gärtner, tends to treat the Lucan material as a reliable historical source for knowledge about Paul in Athens.¹³² This significant discussion will be evaluated in this chapter.

Hoerber 1995; Horst 1999; Johnson 1982; Külling 1980; Legrand 1981; Marcus 1988; McKay 1994; Morland 1994; Morrice 1972; Moxnes 1995; Neyrey 1990; Prior, K. 1995; Proctor 1992; Sandnes 1993; Shields 1977; Valen-Sendstad, A. 1995b; Weinert 1987; Wenham 1988; Wenham 2000; Winter 1991; Winter 1996; Wycherley 1968; Yeo 1994; Zweck 1989.

¹²⁸ See esp. Bruce 1977; Gasque 1975; Gempf 1988; Gempf 1993b; Green, M. 1970; Hemer 1989a; Hvalvik 1992; Liefeld 1995; Marshall 1992a; Marshall 1992c; Powell 1991; Soards 1994; and Vielhauler 1968. For other studies relevant to specific topics, see the footnotes under each section in this chapter.

¹²⁹ See Lüdemann 1989; Schneider, G. 1982; and Schille 1983.

¹³⁰ Notably the following commentaries: Roloff 1981; Weiser 1985; and Pesch 1986.

¹³¹ On the difference between the 'German' and the 'British' exegetical approaches to Acts, see e.g. Larsson 1990. Given tries to steer a middle way between these two approaches and calls for an interpretative approach he characterizes as "Not either/or but both/and in Paul's Areopagus Speech" (Given 1995). His contribution is esp. valuable in terms of understanding the text simultaneously from two complementary perspectives, i.e. from the orator/oratees perspective as well as from the narrator/narratees perspective. The authenticity question (see 3.3), however, is inadequately treated by Given.

¹³² See esp. the writings of F. F. Bruce, I. H. Marshall, C. J. Hemer, B. W. Winter and C. H. Gempf. W.C. van Unnik claimed in 1966 that the view that Luke accurately records a historical speech by the apostle reflects "a certain naivete" (van Unnik 1968:30). This has been seriously

3.2.3 Major topics

A number of key issues have been raised in the contemporary scholarly discussion on Acts 17:16-34. As indicated above (3.2.1-2), it seems possible to identify at least three main interrelated areas of discussion. The first area has to do with the authenticity of the Lucan account of Paul's visit to Athens, in terms of setting, speech and speaker. The second main area deals with specific questions regarding Paul in the Athenian context, in terms of location, occasion, religion, and philosophy. The third area focuses on Paul as public speaker and missionary; i.e. his rhetorical and missionary approach when faced with Athens. This chapter will evaluate the contemporary discussion of these topics.

3.3 The Question of the Authenticity of the Account: Setting, Speech and Speaker

3.3.1 Introducing the authenticity question

The commentators present conflicting views on whether Acts 17:16-34 should be seen as historically and theologically authentic. This section (3.3.) briefly assesses this discussion on the basis of two key assumptions.¹³³

challenged by the late C. Hemer's contributions, esp. his magisterial study *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Hemer 1989a).

¹³³ This is partly based on Long 1994:194-198, which is an application of Toulmin 1958:94-145.

The *first* assumption is that the larger discourse unit (in this case the Book of Acts) should be assessed for its generic and historical character before rendering verdicts on the smaller units (in this case Acts 17:16-34). This is due to fundamental principles of discourse, such as the principles that a) "language is multi-tiered" and b) that "each successively higher level of textual organization influences all of the lower levels of which it is composed".¹³⁴ It has previously been argued that the Book of Acts should be seen as having a basic historical purpose (2.3.1). This means, among other things, that the author of Acts makes "fairly unmistakable historical truth claims"¹³⁵. It should be noted that these claims to historicity seem to have been taken increasingly seriously among contemporary commentators.¹³⁶ Thus, an approach to Luke-Acts "with - at the very minimum - an open mind regarding their historical value"¹³⁷ seems justified. This implies that to consider the Book of Acts as having a basic historical character is a legitimate – or even a plausible – exegetical view.

The *second* assumption is that the authenticity question primarily should be discussed on the basis of indications in the actual passage. This means exploring whether there are clear indications in the text itself, that this passage should be treated in a different way than the rest of the Book of Acts. Gempf states the issues:

¹³⁴ See Bergen 1987. Long points out that "one must consider the character and truth claims (the apparent [embodied] intent) of the larger discourse unit before passing judgment on the historical value of the smaller" (Long 1994:48).

¹³⁵ Long 1994:93. See also Hemer 1989a:85.

¹³⁶ Larsson makes this observation in an overview article on Acts in 1993 (Larsson 1993:15). One significant indication of this change of attitudes is seen in the general outlook of the major

"A more helpful criticism of the speeches in Acts would be *if* it could be shown, in the account of Paul's visit to Athens, that either the altar mentioned by Paul could not have existed (thus suggesting that the speech was unsuitable for the alleged situation) or that the speech goes against Paul's own theology (thus suggesting that the speech was unsuitable for the alleged speaker)."¹³⁸

This naturally leads to the contemporary discussion on the authenticity of the setting and the speech (3.3.2) as well as of the speaker (3.3.3).

3.3.2 *The historical authenticity of the Athenian setting and the Areopagus Speech*

3.3.2.1 *Athenian motifs in the text*

The commentators agree on the presence of a number of explicit Athenian motifs in the Lucan account. These are usually confirmed by archaeological and literary evidence.¹³⁹

1. The number of explicit Athenian motifs in *the narrative framework* include a) the presence of a synagogue in Athens (17:17a)¹⁴⁰; b) the Athenian *agora* as a crucial place for philosophical and religious discussion (17:17b-18); c) the fact of philosophical and religious pluralism (17:16-18; with Stoicism and Epicureanism as the dominant rival philosophical schools and a seemingly endless variety of religious altars and images); d) the use of the specific Athenian term *σπερμολόγος* as a description of Paul (17:18); e)

series *Acts in Its First Century Setting* (A1CS).

¹³⁷ Marshall 1992c:75.

¹³⁸ Gempf 1993b:302. This is the application to Acts 17:16-34 of the general hermeneutical rule referred to in 1.4.3.

¹³⁹ See Hemer 1989a:116-119 for the documentation.

the description of the Athenians as being notoriously curious (17:19-21); f) the negative reaction to the declaration of the resurrection (17:32a); and g) the use of the appropriate title *Ἀρεοπαγίτης* (17:34).

2. The number of explicit Athenian motifs in *the recorded speech* include both a) references to Athenian religion (objects of worship, 17:23; hand-made temples, 17:24; sacrifices, 17:25; and gods 17:29) and b) allusions/references to Greek literature (at least in 17:28, but probably also in other parts of the speech).

On the basis of such textual observations, regardless of their basic view on authenticity, most commentators tend to agree that Acts 17:16-34 has a definite 'local colour'.¹⁴¹ The presence of explicit Athenian motifs in the Lucan account, however, does not present any final evidence in terms of authenticity, since such motifs could have been fabricated by the author (on the basis of common knowledge) to provide the setting and/or the speech with 'local colour'.¹⁴²

C. Hemer has made a significant contribution to this discussion on authenticity by drawing the attention to tacit Athenian motifs, which Luke does not mention, but whose implicit

¹⁴⁰ See Levinskaya 1996:154,158-162.

¹⁴¹ See e.g. Bruce 1990a and Conzelmann 1987.

¹⁴² This view is found in some recent commentators such as Gill, D. 1999.

dynamic "gives point to the scene in a Pauline rather than a Lucan context".¹⁴³ He summarizes this argument in the following way:

"[There] are several latent motifs which are not explicable as redactional. The topographic unity of the scene, for which I have argued in *NTS* 20 (1974), pp. 341-50, is focused in Pauline Athens, and embedded in literary and archaeological backgrounds which are never made explicit by Luke. There is the further point that the speech appears to use implicitly arguments directed at the thinking of Stoics, Epicureans and the traditional religions of Athens, and that a catena of citations from Aratus, Epimenides and Aeschylus underlies the debate."¹⁴⁴

The presence of such implicit Athenian motifs in the Lucan account, however, should not be considered as conclusive 'proof'¹⁴⁵, but rather as 'evidence' pointing to the historical authenticity of the setting and the speech¹⁴⁶. Though clearly indicating traces of the alleged original situation, these arguments from explicit and implicit Athenian motifs have not solved the specific historical question of whether an altar 'To an unknown god' existed – or could have existed – in Athens at this time.

¹⁴³ Hemer 1989b:242-243 (Hemer's original reads 'Lukan'). Hemer also observes that, in contrast to the 'immediacy' of e.g. Acts 27-28, "the scenes which must have come from Paul's own vivid description, such as those before the Areopagus and at Ephesus, are again subtly different, vivid but not 'immediate'" (Hemer 1989a:389).

¹⁴⁴ Hemer 1989a:215-216; cf. also Hemer 1974. See further the section on location (3.4.1).

¹⁴⁵ This is also acknowledged in Hemer 1989b:242.

¹⁴⁶ Winter suggests that the convention surrounding the Areopagus speech supports that it is a speech delivered *in situ* in Athens, since Paul was asked to present a 'declamation speech' before the Areopagus Council. Winter claims thus that "a good case could be argued that the Athenian speech is a summary of a written source because of established conventions in the 1st century" (Winter 1991:115).

3.3.2.2 *The altar: A testcase?* ¹⁴⁷

In 17:23 the Lucan Paul refers to an altar with the inscription ' Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ. All commentators would agree that such an altar has not been identified by archaeological excavations or in the extrabiblical literature¹⁴⁸, and this question has often been considered as the major historical problem regarding the historical authenticity of Acts 17:16-34.

1. Some commentators consider the altar as being a Lucan invention. Conzelmann is a representative of this view (which follows Norden in his pioneering work from 1913): "Paul's use of the altar inscription as his point of contact with the Athenians is a purely literary motif, since there was no inscription in this form."¹⁴⁹ It has been pointed out recently, however, on the basis of literary evidence about "altars to unknown gods", that "it is too early to conclude from silence that the singular could not have been used".¹⁵⁰ Other commentators would therefore argue for the existence of such an altar in Athens at this time, at least with the plural inscription, and that Paul possibly changed the plural into

¹⁴⁷ See also 3.4.3.2 for a discussion on Paul's use of the altar in his argument.

¹⁴⁸ The literary evidence includes esp. Pausanias's *Desc.* 1.1.4 and 5.14.8, Diogenes Laertius *Vit.* 1.110, and Philostratus's *Vit. Ap.* 4.3. "The one relevant piece of archaeological data comes from an altar from the second century A.D. found in the precincts of the temple of Demeter in Pergamum in Asia Minor. Unfortunately, the inscription is broken off at the crucial point, but it appears probable in view of the number of letters per line and the fragment of a word we do have that it should be restored to read 'to gods unknown. Capito the torchbearer [dedicated this altar].'" (Witherington 1998:522) For an overview and a further discussion of the literary and archaeological evidence, see: Bruce 1990a:380-381; Weiser 1985: 467-468; Hemer 1989a:117-118; Gill, D.W. 1994a:446-447; Horst 1999; and Witherington 1998:521-523.

¹⁴⁹ Conzelmann 1987:140.

¹⁵⁰ Gempf 1993a:51. Hemer comments: "Much is sometimes made of the objection that the passages which speak explicitly of 'unknown' gods always do so in the plural, but these plurals, with the plural βωμοί, may be generalizing plurals, or Paul may have chosen to refer to a

singular.¹⁵¹ Winter suggests, however, that whether Paul "actually saw the divine title in the plural or the singular would have been of no importance to his audience, for the terms 'god' and 'gods' were used interchangeably by Stoics and Epicureans in the same sentence"¹⁵².

All this implies that such an altar clearly *could* have existed in Athens at this time.

2. Wycherley has offered an alternative explanation to this historical enigma, suggesting that the 'altar' was a hero shrine, which could have been linked to Mycenaean tombs in the Athenian *agora*. These (Bronze Age) tombs were later considered sacred and became places for offerings.

"A legend and a name might grow and attach itself to the spot, but not necessarily so; the cult might remain truly the cult of an unknown god. Strictly speaking it would be a hero-cult, and the shrine a *heroon*; but the distinction is not at all clear, and even an obscure local hero could be called *theos*. Some at least of the cult of 'unknown' and nameless deities may well have arisen in this way."¹⁵³

This explanation would imply that Paul appropriately could have referred to such a hero-cult of an unnamed θεός in his speech.

Two alternative - and what seem to be equally plausible - explanations have thus been offered to the historical problem of the altar 'To an unknown God'. The whole discussion is a result of lack of proper historical evidence, and it seems therefore inappropriate to

dedication to a particular god." (Hemer 1989a:117)

¹⁵¹ There is no need to conclude – with Barnes – that Paul is "using the sophisticated trick of slightly misrepresenting the evidence in his own favour" (Barnes 1969:418)

¹⁵² Winter 1991:115; see also Winter 1991:119-120.

¹⁵³ Wycherley 1968:621. See also Gill, D.W. 1994a:446-447.

reach any final conclusions. What should be pointed out, though, is that the contemporary scholarly debate has not shown, in any convincing way, that the altar mentioned by Paul could not have existed. *Therefore, the unresolved historical question of the altar 'To an unknown god' does not constitute a valid objection to considering the Lucan account in Acts 17:16-34 as suitable for the alleged situation in ancient Athens.*¹⁵⁴ It still remains to see, however, whether the speech can be shown as suitable for the apostle Paul as the alleged speaker.

3.3.3 *The historical and theological authenticity of the speaker*

The contemporary discussion on the authenticity of the alleged speaker in Athens has focused on the relationship between the theology of the Lucan Paul in Acts 17:16-34 and the theology of the Pauline epistles.¹⁵⁵ Four passages seem to have been particularly

¹⁵⁴ Witherington writes accordingly, that the evidence "can be interpreted in various ways, but one thing is clear – flat dismissal of the historical possibility of such inscriptions is out of the question, since it is based largely on an argument from silence" (Witherington 1998:520-521).

¹⁵⁵ A comparison between the Areopagus Speech and the Pauline Epistles must be done in an appropriate way. Conzelmann claims that "the 'genuineness' of the speech cannot be demonstrated by going through the Pauline epistles and finding reminiscences ... The question rather is whether, on the one hand, the theme of the Areopagus speech as a whole has a parallel in Paul, and on the other hand whether specifically Pauline *theologumena* are to be found in it." (Conzelmann 1987:147). Another approach is represented by Wenham who claims that it is "worth emphasising the occasional nature of Paul's letters and the limited scope of Luke's description of Paul" (Wenham 1993:257). *The subsequent analysis follows Wenham, emphasizing the possibility of complementarity rather than presupposing contradiction, thus insisting on a responsible 'harmonization' – if possible - between the Lucan account in Acts 17:16-34 and relevant Pauline passages.* The legitimacy of this approach was indicated in 1.4.4.

prominent in – or relevant for – this discussion¹⁵⁶: 1 Thess. 1:9-10, 1 Cor. 2:1-2, 1 Cor. 9:19-23, and Rom.1:18-23.¹⁵⁷

3.3.3.1 *Consistency with 1 Thess. 1:9-10: Convincing and converting Gentiles.*

Most commentators seem to agree on the presence of certain basic similarities in structure and content between Acts 17:22-31 and 1 Thess. 1:9-10. These similarities have been helpfully outlined by Hvalvik in the following way¹⁵⁸:

- a) Acts 17:29-30 and 1 Thess. 1:9: Conversion from idols to the living God.
- b) Acts 17:31a and 1 Thess. 1:10b: The coming divine judgment.
- c) Acts 17:31b and 1 Thess. 1:10a: The resurrection of Jesus.

These basic similarities between these two passages, however, have been explained in different ways. Some would suggest that 1 Thess. 1:9-10 just reflects "formulations which are taken directly from common church tradition"¹⁵⁹, and does not necessarily state a specifically Pauline theology. Others would argue that only Acts 17:29-31 reflects an authentic Pauline theology, and that these verses have been added to the main portion of the speech (17:22-28) which reflects a syncretistic theology.¹⁶⁰ It seems more appropriate,

¹⁵⁶ It should also be noticed that Paul describes himself as an apologist (Phil. 1:7,16) and elsewhere alludes to the apologetic task (2 Cor. 5:11; 10:5).

¹⁵⁷ This is evident from the treatment in major commentaries.

¹⁵⁸ Hvalvik 1992:63. The problem with Hvalvik's (otherwise largely helpful) outline is the exclusive focus on 17:29-31, thus seemingly underestimating the argument in 17:24-28.

¹⁵⁹ Conzelmann 1987:147.

¹⁶⁰ For criticisms of this interpretation (found mainly in the German exegetical tradition), see e.g. Morland 1994:252-255 and Larsson 1987:393-394.

though, on the basis of 1 Thess. 1:9-10¹⁶¹, to interpret the whole Areopagus Speech as an authentic reflection of the language of early public presentations to Gentiles.

The basis for this latter view is found in a series of observations. Both passages relate to the essential missionary process of convincing and converting Gentiles. Gempf remarks that the differences in content "between the two passages are slight and consistent with the fact that the one is directed toward pagans and the other toward those who have become Christians."¹⁶² Wenham makes the significant additional observation that 1 Thessalonians usually is "thought to have been written from Corinth very shortly after Paul's visit to Athens",¹⁶³ which (on the basis of the essential similarities between the two passages) implies that the case for Luke having accurate information about the Pauline ministry at this time is considerably strengthened. The appropriate conclusion, then, is that *1 Thess. 1:9-10 is consistent with the Areopagus Speech* and provides the interpreter with an essential key to a proper understanding of the speech in a missionary context (see also 3.5.2).

¹⁶¹ Winter observes that "while other public speakers might measure their success by passing the magic audience number of 17, the success of their pupils, and their public following, Paul assesses his coming to the Thessalonian brethren by declaring that it had not been in vain for they had changed their spiritual direction, their attitude to religious service and their philosophical re-orientation of history ([1 Thess] 1:9-2:1)" (Winter 1993a:65).

¹⁶² Gempf 1993a:53; cf. also Stott 1991:38-43.

¹⁶³ Wenham 1993:247. See 1 Thess. 3:1. Wenham is even more explicit in an earlier article: "It could be a remarkable coincidence that Luke describes Paul's evangelistic ministry at this time in terms so strikingly similar to those actually used by Paul in describing his own ministry in this period; but it is simpler to do without the hypothesis of coincidence and to suggest that Luke had accurate information about Paul's ministry at this time." (Wenham 1988:54) This is affirmed in a recent article, where Wenham claims that *1 Thess. 1:9-10 should be seen as "significant evidence that Paul did preach in places like Athens in the way Acts describe"* (Wenham 2000:87; italics added).

3.3.3.2 Consistency with 1 Cor. 2:1-2: Paul's missionary strategy.

The distinctive theological emphasis of the Areopagus Speech, combined with what many commentators would see as a meagre result (17:32-34), has led to the opinion, held both in scholarly and popular circles, that Paul *either* is misrepresented *or* actually failed in Athens.¹⁶⁴ These interpretations of the Areopagus Speech are usually defended with reference to 1 Cor. 2:1-2.

Vielhauer holds the view that Luke misrepresents Paul as having a friendly attitude towards pagan religion, as proclaiming the gospel in Stoic terms, and as preaching natural theology instead of the cross of Christ. Vielhauer insists that the real Paul would have preached Christ crucified (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22-2:5).¹⁶⁵ This view of Acts 17:16-34, however, runs contrary to the argument presented above, in 2.3.1-2 and 3.3.1, in favour of the general historical reliability of the Lucan account.

The view that Paul actually failed in Athens, and therefore changed his missionary strategy when coming to Corinth, is found in some more popular treatments¹⁶⁶ but is "not much in vogue in current academic circles"¹⁶⁷. Stott provides an accurate summary of this popular view:

¹⁶⁴ This will be discussed in relation to Paul's apologetic in Athens in 5.3.1.3 and 5.3.2.

¹⁶⁵ See Vielhauer 1968 and Powell 1991:91-92.

¹⁶⁶ See e.g. Price 1970:96-99, Willimon 1988:142-145, and the references in Dennison 2000:75.

¹⁶⁷ Hemer 1989b:257.

"The popular reconstruction of the situation is well known. Paul arrived in Corinth from Athens. His sermon to the Athenian philosophers (so the theory goes) had been a flop. Not only had it been too intellectual, but Paul had not preached the gospel. He had focused on the creation instead of the cross. As a result, there had been no conversions. So, on his way from Athens to Corinth, Paul repented of the distorted gospel he had preached in Athens and resolved in Corinth to limit his message to the cross."¹⁶⁸

This understanding of Acts 17 and 1 Cor. 2, however, has in some recent studies been shown to be quite untenable. Carson points out that this popular interpretation not only misunderstands the Acts 17 passage, but also is an example of an exegetical fallacy of causation, which mistakes correlation for cause ('cum hoc, propter hoc'). "In fact, there is a geographical and temporal correlation (Paul did travel to Corinth from Athens), but not a shred of evidence for causation."¹⁶⁹ Stott, in the form of four key arguments, presents one of the more thorough refutations of this popular view:

"First, there is no trace in Luke's narrative that he is displeased with Paul's performance in Athens... Secondly, it is inaccurate to dub Paul's visit to Athens a failure... Thirdly, I believe Paul did preach the cross in Athens... Fourthly, what Paul renounced in Corinth was not the biblical doctrine of God as Creator, Lord and Judge, but the wisdom of the world and the rhetoric of the Greeks. His firm 'decision' to preach nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified was taken because of the anticipated challenges of proud Corinth, not because of his supposed failure in Athens... Paul did not change his tactic in Corinth, but continued to teach, argue and persuade (18:4-5)"¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ A summary found in Stott 1992:60.

¹⁶⁹ Carson 1996a:134; see further 6.2.2.2.

¹⁷⁰ Stott 1990:289-290. See also: Stott 1992:57-69; Gempf 1993a:53-54; Stonehouse 1949:39-48; and Adams 1992:135-147.

The basis for this interpretation is strengthened even further when looking at Paul in 1 Cor. 2 against the appropriate cultural background (which in fact seems to have been similar to that of 1 Thess. 1-2). Winter argues – in a recent major study – that 1 Cor. 2:1-5 should be seen as an *apologia* for Paul's anti-sophistic stance when coming to Corinth for the first time, where sophists

A further argument in favour of the theological consistency between Acts 17 and 1 Corinthians 2 is provided by Gempf. He notes that the style of argument in 1 Corinthians is similar to that of the Areopagus Speech. "In 1 Corinthians more clearly than the other letters, Paul employs the tactic of citing slogans of his opponents with apparent approval, only to add such severe qualifications and restrictions as to reverse the meaning... This is precisely the tactic used in the Athens speech."¹⁷¹

The appropriate conclusion, then, is, *on the one hand, that the charge of inconsistency between the Areopagus Speech and 1 Cor. 2:1-2 does not hold, and, on the other hand, that consistency between the two passages can be shown.*

3.3.3.3 Consistency with 1 Cor. 9:19-23: Cultural sensitivity and adaptability

The relevance of 1 Cor. 9:19-23 to the discussion of the historical and theological authenticity of the Lucan Paul in the Areopagus Speech seems to have been underestimated by a number of commentators.

seemed to have been a major force at that time. Paul thus "refused to anchor the confidence of the Corinthian converts in the persuasiveness of rhetorical argumentation; therefore he adopted an anti-sophistic posture to eliminate any confusion of his message with that of the sophists. ...He did not aim to persuade his audience of the truth of this message by the use of the three *pisteis* in rhetoric, namely ἡθος, πάθος and ἀπόδειξις. His reasons for it are clearly spelt out in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5: he does not wish their πίστις to rest in human wisdom but ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ." (Winter 1997b: 161,187) Paul thus clearly aimed at persuasion in Corinth (see e.g. 2 Cor. 5:11), but he avoided manipulative persuasion.

Accordingly, Witherington points out (in a comment to Acts 17:3; see 2.2.4), that Paul "did not resort to sophistic rhetoric but rhetoric of a more sophisticated and substantial sort, involving proofs and not mere flattery or emotional appeal" (Witherington 1998: 505).

¹⁷¹ Gempf 1993a:54. This 'tactic', however, does not rule out the affirmation of elements of truth within pagan beliefs.

This significant Pauline passage describes the apostle's willingness and determination, as an evangelist-apologist, to sacrifice "matters of racial identity, religious sensitivity and conscience"¹⁷². This cultural sensitivity and adaptability is seen worked out in a non-Jewish setting (i.e. 'for those without the law'; 1 Cor. 9:20) most clearly in Athens, where Paul "met [the Gentiles] on their own ground"¹⁷³. Thus, the Areopagus Speech illustrates the apostle's aim not to make "the law of Moses...the basis or aim of his preaching to [the Gentiles]"¹⁷⁴. Winter suggests that the repeated 'I have become' (1 Cor. 9) indicates that at a point in time Paul made a decision as a missionary strategist: "He would be cross-cultural in his gospel presentation and life-style, and, *by all...means*, innovative in his approach."¹⁷⁵

These brief observations on Paul's explicit statement in 1 Cor. 9:19-23 – on how he consciously relates to Jews and Gentiles with "magnificent cultural flexibility"¹⁷⁶ – strengthen the case (argued above in relation to 1 Cor. 2:1-2) for *seeing Acts 17 and 1 Corinthians as complementary rather than contradictory*.

3.3.3.4 Consistency with Rom. 1:18-23: Natural theology.

The understanding of the relationship between Acts 17 and Romans 1 has been in the forefront of the contemporary discussion. Some scholars, like Haenchen, Vielhauer and

¹⁷² Prior, D. 1985:159.

¹⁷³ Morris 1989:136. As Longenecker argues: "From the days of the Fathers, Paul's Athenian experience has been cited as the illustration of the 'all things to all men' principle as it worked out in the Gentile situation." (Longenecker 1964:230; see also Berentsen 1983:107-109, 113-114; and Moe 1950:279-297.)

¹⁷⁴ Findlay 1988:854.

Conzelmann, claim that these passages are incompatible. On the other hand, other scholars, like Bruce, Hemer and Gempf, claim that they are expressing the same theology.

Following on from Dibelius, the representatives of the *first* view claim that the Lucan Paul is "telling pagans they possess a natural kinship with God which needs only to be purified, corrected and enlarged (Acts 17:22-31); in his letters, Paul says pagans will suffer the wrath of God because their ignorance of God is without excuse (Rom.1:18-23)."¹⁷⁷ In a significant article on the rhetorical characteristics of Acts 17 (see 3.5.1), Yeo finds it "hard to see how Paul could be so negative in Romans 1 and how the Lucan Paul could be so positive in Acts".¹⁷⁸ The heart of the matter, however, is whether such statements describe the two passages in an accurate way.

One of the most prominent exponents of the *alternative* view (which follows Gärtner's basic approach), Bruce, suggests a totally different interpretive approach: "In truth every theme in the Areopagitica is treated by Paul in Romans 1-3. If the author of Rom.1-3 were brought to Athens and invited to expound his teaching to the court of the Areopagus, it is difficult to think how he would have responded otherwise than Paul is represented as doing in Acts 17:22-31"¹⁷⁹ The exegetical result of such an approach to the two passages is presented by Gempf: "Both Romans and Acts 17 display the conviction that enough can be known about God from his universe to make human beings reject idolatry. Neither Romans

¹⁷⁵ Winter 1994a:1176.

¹⁷⁶ Carson 1999 (on Feb. 22); cf. also 6.2.2.2.

¹⁷⁷ Powell 1991:35.

nor Acts 17, however, holds much in the way of hope that people will come to know God by natural revelation alone."¹⁸⁰

Shields suggested a *third* alternative in 1977; on the one hand that the similarities between the two passages prevent it from being a pure Lucan invention, and on the other hand that the differences make it "nearly impossible to attribute the Athens sermon as we have it to the apostle to the Gentiles"¹⁸¹. This ambiguous approach is unconvincing, however, since it both seems to minimize the major difference in settings/audiences and largely to ignore Luke's general credibility as a historian.

The interpretation offered by Bruce and Gempf above seems to be the most adequate treatment of both passages as well as of the relationship between them, since it takes both context and audience into proper account. It also seems to be the only view (of the three mentioned above), which takes seriously Luke's general reliability as a historian. This exegetical approach implies that *both passages* are seen as affirming a) the reality of God's revelation through creation, b) the availability of this revelation to humanity after the Fall, c) the constant human suppression of this awareness of God, and d) the resulting human ignorance and guilt.¹⁸² This leads to the appropriate conclusion that, *if context and audience are taken into proper account, the essential theological consistency between Acts 17 and*

¹⁷⁸ Yeo 1994:97. Yeo's original reads 'Lukan'.

¹⁷⁹ Bruce 1984:2586; see also Guthrie 1981:162-163.

¹⁸⁰ Gempf 1993a:54.

¹⁸¹ Shields 1977:39.

¹⁸² This interpretation of Rom. 1 is also supported by the careful arguments in Baker 1998 and Kjær 1997. See also Lewis, G. & Demarest 1996 I:69-71.

*Romans 1 can be shown.*¹⁸³ This, however, does not mean that the apologetic arguments of the two passages necessarily should be seen as identical, but possibly as complementary.¹⁸⁴

*The preceding discussion (in 3.3) has concluded positively about the authenticity of the Lucan account in Acts 17:16-34, on the basis of an evaluation of the contemporary discussion of the authenticity of the setting, the speech and the speaker.*¹⁸⁵ This leads to an assessment of the contemporary discussion on contextual questions (3.4) and questions concerning rhetoric and mission (3.5).

¹⁸³ Hemer observes accordingly, that the “difficulty with Romans 1 is ... only serious if the two versions of Paul may be shown to be incompatible, rather than just contextually different. It cannot of course be demonstrated that they proceed from the same mind. Their general compatibility is all that can, or need, be affirmed.” (Hemer 1989b:251)

¹⁸⁴ Craig points out that the expression ἄόρατα...νοούμενα καθορᾶται (Rom. 1:20) could be interpreted as indicating “that inferential reasoning is involved in the perception of God’s invisible nature in the creation, meaning something like ‘God’s invisible nature is perceived through reflecting on the things that have been made’” (Craig in Cowan 2000:40). Few, if any, commentators seem to interpret Paul’s speech in Acts 17:16-34, however, as an inferential reasoning from nature about the existence and nature of God (i.e. as ‘theistic proof(s)’). See further 3.4.4.3.

¹⁸⁵ There is thus no need to postulate that the speech has originated as a Hellenistic Jewish sermon (as claimed in Barrett 1991:243-244 and Barrett 1998:cxvii.825-826).

3.4 The Question of the Athenian Context: Location, Occasion, Religion and Philosophy

3.4.1 *The location of the speech*

3.4.1.1 *A general location to Athens*

The Lucan account clearly locates the Areopagus Speech in Athens, which the preceding discussion (3.3.2) has argued for as an appropriate general setting for the speech.

Thompson gives a succinct and graphic summary of first century Athens:

"Athens was 8 km (5 miles) inland from the port of Piraeus. Inside the gate, a visitor would find himself on a long avenue flanked by large buildings. It led to the agora (market place), the political, commercial and social centre surrounded by public buildings. It was close to the large rocky hill called the Acropolis where there were many temples to the gods. The Acropolis was approached by a marble staircase lined with sculptured friezes and monuments. At the top there was the Parthenon built by Pericles in the fifth century BC, in honour of the city's goddess Athena, and a magnificent statue of her stood to the left. Nearby was the Areopagus. Named after the god of war, Ares, this small hill was originally the meeting place for the most ancient court and council of Athens, though when Paul was called to explain his teaching the court had moved to the 'Royal Porch' in the agora. The Areopagus was surrounded by altars and monuments. The synagogue where Paul preached was near the agora."¹⁸⁶

The exact location of Paul's speech in Athens, however, has – despite Thompson's claim above - been the focus of an extensive scholarly discussion.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Thompson 1986:52.

¹⁸⁷ See e.g. the overview in Morland 1994:250-251.

3.4.1.2 Ares Hill or the Stoa Basileios?

The scholarly discussion on the exact location in Athens is due to the ambiguous expression "Ἀρειος Πάγος" (in 17:19 and 17:22). At the time of Paul, this seems to have been used both geographically about 'Ares (or Mars) Hill' and technically about 'the Areopagus Council'.¹⁸⁸ According to the ancient evidence, the council seems to have had their sessions on the Ares Hill and/or in the *Stoa Basileios* (near the north-west corner of the *agora*).¹⁸⁹ The case for the Ares Hill setting is often argued by scholars who would question the historicity of the Lucan account, but this should not be seen as decisive.¹⁹⁰

In two carefully argued articles, both firmly based on the ancient evidence, Barnes argues for the Ares Hill setting, whereas Hemer argues for the *Stoa Basileios* setting.¹⁹¹ According to Barnes, "the obvious meaning of the words in Acts should be accepted: Paul was taken before the Areopagus, i.e. before the council sitting on the hill".¹⁹² Hemer, on the other hand, claims that the *Stoa Basileios* "is a legitimate option, and in fact a strongly probable one which permits a natural, attractive and illuminating reconstruction of the

¹⁸⁸ "The hill" is preferred by e.g. Conzelmann 1987:139-140; Haenchen 1977:498; Lövestam 1988:285; Roloff 1981:258; and Weiser 1985:465-466; whereas "the court" (usually in a more informal capacity) is preferred by e.g. Bruce 1990a:397; Gempf 1994:1093; Krodel 1986:326-327, Larsson 1987:385-386; Longenecker 1981:474; Pesch 1986:135; and Schneider, G. 1982:236-237.

¹⁸⁹ Overviews of the debate are given e.g. in Morland 1994:250-251 and Gill, D.W. 1994a: 447-448.

¹⁹⁰ An observation made by Morland 1994:264. See e.g. Conzelmann 1987:137-140, Haenchen 1977:498; and Weiser 1985:465-466.

¹⁹¹ See Barnes 1969 and Hemer 1974.

¹⁹² Barnes 1969:410; quoted approvingly by e.g. Gill, D.W. 1994a:448.

incident as focusing closely on a small, significant locality”¹⁹³. Whereas both options are quite possible¹⁹⁴, Hemer’s proposal seems to fit the textual evidence better altogether.¹⁹⁵

The basis for Hemer's argument is found in a significant series of connections¹⁹⁶ concerning the northwest corner of the *agora*: a) This corner was close to the main entrance when coming from Piraeus (cf. 17:15-16); b) The north-west corner was close to the *Stoa Basileios* and the *Stoa Poikila* (where Zeno and his followers, the Stoics, taught; cf. 17:17-18); c) This specific corner was close to many Hermae-figures (cf. κατείδωλος, 17:16)¹⁹⁷; d) The north-western corner was also one of the meeting-places of the Ἄρειος Πάγος (17:19), especially in routine matters.¹⁹⁸ In locating the whole scene to the

¹⁹³ Hemer 1974:349.

¹⁹⁴ Gill suggests that it perhaps “is misplaced to try to identify the actual place; the fact that Paul appeared before the Areopagus is the essential point” (Gill, D.W. 1994a:448). Gempf observes accordingly, that since “there are good arguments on both sides of this controversy, it is probably best to leave the question open” (Gempf 1993a:52).

¹⁹⁵ It is crucial to note that the argument that the Areopagus hill “was not large enough to hold a crowd is false” (Marshall 1980:285). This implies that the location at the hill “cannot be excluded simplistically by this supposition” (Hemer 1989a:117).

¹⁹⁶ Hemer admits that the whole argument is circumstantial (see Hemer 1974:349). These observations are also brought out, at least partly, in Wycherley 1968:619-620 and Gill, D.W. 1994a:441-445.

¹⁹⁷ Wycherley's note on the meaning of κατείδωλος seems to support Hemer (see Wycherley 1968:619-620).

¹⁹⁸ In the article published posthumously in 1989, Hemer clarifies his position in relation to Barnes: “We differ from him in suggesting that this continuity [of place and practice] embraced both locations, and that the *Basileus* was a convenient venue for routine matters in the heart of the city, whereas the religious associations of the hill were reserved for religious functions or homicide cases.” (Hemer 1989b:240)

north-west corner of the *agora*, then, “the whole occasion assumes a strikingly economical dramatic unity of place”¹⁹⁹.

Hemer's specific proposal should also be seen in the context of an understanding of the *agora* setting in its totality. Longenecker provides an illuminating description of the Athenian *agora* at this time:

"The *agora* lay west of the Acropolis. It was the forum and marketplace of the city and, therefore, the center of Athenian life. The commercial sections included the large Stoa of Attalus, stretching along the eastern side and flanked by a number of smaller colonnades on the northern and southern sides. The western side consisted of important public buildings: the circular Tholos, or office and dining room of the Prytanem; the Bouleuterion, or senate house; the Metroon or official archives, before which stood the temple of Ares and statues of the eponymous heroes of the city; the temple of Apollo Patroon; and the Stoa Basileios."²⁰⁰

This plausible location of Paul's speech to the agora setting in general – and specifically to the north-western corner of the agora - will be presupposed in the following discussion.

3.4.2 The nature of the occasion

3.4.2.1 Facing the Areopagus Council?

The location of the whole scene to the north-western corner of the *agora* rules out the suggestion made by some commentators that the Ἐπειὸς Πάγος simply describes an

¹⁹⁹ Hemer 1989b:240.

²⁰⁰ Longenecker 1981:473.

unofficial gathering of Athenians generally on the Ares (or Mars) Hill.²⁰¹ The majority of interpreters (exemplified above by Barnes, Hemer, Gill and Gempf) interpret 17:19ff as a description of Paul in a setting before the Areopagus Council. The main textual basis for this understanding is found in expressions such as ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου Πάγου (v.22) and ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶ (v.33) as well as the reference to Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης (v.34).²⁰² The question facing the interpreters, then, is the nature of this occasion, i.e. whether Paul was facing a formal trial or whether the Council setting could – or maybe should – be explained in another way.

3.4.2.2 *Facing a trial?*

A judicial reading of this passage would fit the wider context of Acts 16 -19, where the judicial element is quite obvious; Paul is facing accusations and courts everywhere (except in Berea).²⁰³ The view held by most recent commentators, however, seems to be that the Lucan record in Acts 17:19-34 doesn't qualify as a formal trial scene. This judgment is based on a series of textual observations by the commentators. *First*, the narrative framework does not seem to point to a formal trial, since there is a lack of explicit judicial proceedings, both in terms of formal charges and final rulings. *Secondly*, the emphasis on the curiosity of the audience (17:19-21) seems to make a narrow judicial reading of this

²⁰¹ See e.g. Morrice 1972.

²⁰² Marshall takes this reference as decisive, since it "suggests that Luke meant to describe a meeting of the court, no doubt in public session and not necessarily taking the form of a legal trial" (Marshall 1980:285).

²⁰³ Cf. the analysis of the wider context in Gooding 1990 and Morland 1994.

text impossible.²⁰⁴ *Thirdly*, as will be shown below (3.5.1), the speech itself is not characterized rhetorically as a formal, forensic speech by the commentators. In the light of such textual observations, a judicial reading of Acts 17:16-34 seems to be highly improbable. *It seems thus possible to conclude that Paul clearly wasn't facing a formal trial setting before the Areopagus Council.*

3.4.2.3 Facing a formal enquiry?

The preceding discussion has shown the probability of a Council setting and the improbability of describing this setting as a formal trial. This, however, still leaves the question of the precise nature of the occasion unresolved. Faced with this problem, many commentators have described the passage as an account of a more or less formal enquiry before the Areopagus Council.²⁰⁵ According to common suggestions, the function of the Council might have been that of a) an informal legal enquiry (i.e. a preliminary investigation of possible accusations against Paul), or b) an education commission (to license Paul as a public lecturer in Athens), or c) an authorized religious commission (sanctioning the official introduction of foreign gods to Athens). The *first* alternative seems less likely in the light of the discussion above (3.4.2.2), whereas the *second* alternative

²⁰⁴ See esp. Krodel 1986:327; Pesch 1986:135; and Schneider, G. 1982:237. This is qualified by Morland's suggestion that the narrative aside in 17:21 indicates that a judicial interpretation of this text never could function alone or be the primary interpretation (see Morland 1994:265).

²⁰⁵ This seems to be the main view among English-speaking scholars as well as among those who would argue for the historical authenticity of the Lucan account. See e.g. Hemer 1974; Kennedy 1984:129-130; Krodel 1986:326; Larsson 1987:385-386; Bruce 1990a:377-378; and Morland 1994:255. See also Schneider, G. 1982:236-237 and Pesch 1986:135.

seems to lack any clear indications in the text itself.²⁰⁶ Winter suggests the *third* alternative in a significant article, where he argues that the Lucan narrative fits the picture given in recent research regarding the role and function of the Areopagus Council. In his seminal study, Winter presents relevant background evidence, arguing that

"... the Council of the Areopagus, together with the Council of 600 and the *Demos* ('the People'), sanctioned the official introduction of new gods to Athens. This involved the Areopagus engaging in an evaluation of the cult to see if these were genuine gods being promoted by the particular herald. This was not an adversarial procedure or a trial, as Barnes suggests. It sought only to ascertain several matters: Had there really been an epiphany of the divinity? Was official recognition to be given? What divine honours and statues would be appropriate? When would the annual official feast day be?"²⁰⁷

This understanding of the Council setting corresponds to the second Athenian comment in v.18 (Ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι), which indicates that some in Athens saw Paul as a herald of foreign divinities. It therefore seems to have been an appropriate task for the Areopagus Council - as an authorized religious commission – to investigate about Paul's new message. Winter claims that the Lucan summary of Paul's speech "indicates that he was aware of this perception of himself and exploited it, claiming that he was not introducing new gods but declaring the nature of the God whose presence

²⁰⁶ Witherington's recent suggestion that Paul faced "an adversarial situation" (Witherington 1998:516) seems thus unlikely because of the lack of formal charges in the Lucan text (and is also inconsistent with his positive reference to Winter's study one page later!). The suggestion that Paul faced an "education commission" goes back to Gärtner 1955:56-65, but it seems to be more of a conjecture than the third alternative suggested by Winter.

²⁰⁷ Winter 1996:72 *contra* Barnes 1969.

they had already recognised with the erection of an altar to him"²⁰⁸. *This plausible and illuminating understanding of the nature of the occasion will be presupposed in the following.*

3.4.3 The religious context

The Lucan account of Paul before the Areopagus Council as a herald of foreign gods is set in a context of religious pluralism.²⁰⁹ The commentators agree that the Lucan account of the Areopagus incident stresses the religious context of ancient Athens by focusing on the excessive religiosity of the Athenians. The primary concern in the contemporary discussion has been with how properly to understand the Lucan Paul's interaction with the religiosity of the Athenians, both in terms of the popular piety of the Athenians in general and his use of the specific altar 'To an unknown god' in particular.

3.4.3.1 Paul and the popular piety of the Athenians

It is generally agreed among the commentators that the Lucan narrative touches on Paul's attitude to the popular piety of the Athenians in three different contexts; the introductory scene in 17:16, the *exordium* of the speech in 17:22-23, and the main portion of the speech in 17:24-29.

²⁰⁸ Winter 1996:89.

²⁰⁹ See e.g. Aune 1993.

1. In the introductory scene, κατείδωλος is used (17:16). The meaning of this word has been a matter of some debate. Wycherley suggests that it should be translated 'a veritable forest of idols', thus conveying an eyewitness impression of the vast amount of images of Hermes all over the city but especially "at the north-west corner of the *agora*, between the Poikile (Painted) Stoa and the Basileios (Royal) Stoa".²¹⁰ Gill suggests, on the other hand, the translation 'full of idols', which implies a more general reference describing Paul's actual view of Athens when entering the city. This would include the temples on the Akropolis as well as the cultic centres in and around the *agora*.²¹¹ Both alternatives are conjectural, and both seem to be possible in the light of the available evidence. Many commentators seem to find Wycherley's suggestion attractive. As pointed out by the commentators, Luke's emphasis in 17:16, however, is clearly on Paul's strong emotional reaction when confronted with this idolatry. Stott seems to express the unanimous scholarly opinion that "the pain or 'paroxysm' which Paul felt in Athens was due neither to bad temper, nor to pity ... [but] rather to his abhorrence of idolatry"²¹².

2. Most commentators underline the striking contrast in the Lucan account between Paul's initial reaction (17:16) and Paul's positive tone in the *exordium* (17:22-23), when mentioning their religiosity. A common suggestion to this *crux interpretum* is that Paul here uses "a laudatory introduction"²¹³, what rhetorically should be described as a *captatio*

²¹⁰ Wycherley 1968:619-620.

²¹¹ Gill, D.W. 1994a:444-445 and Gill, D.W. 1994b:85-86.

²¹² Stott 1990:279.

²¹³ BAGD p.173.

*benevolentiae*²¹⁴. Some commentators argue, however, that it was "forbidden to use complimentary exordia in addressing the Areopagus court, with the hope of securing its goodwill".²¹⁵ The word being used, δεισιδαιμονεστέρους (17:22b), is in fact quite ambiguous, meaning either 'very religious'²¹⁶ or 'very superstitious'²¹⁷. Zweck and Given both argue plausibly that this ambiguity is intended and serves an ironic purpose, possibly for (at least some of) the original listeners and in any case most certainly for the readers. As Zweck comments; "In any case the description is not without irony for Luke's Christian readers."²¹⁸

3. It seems to be generally agreed that the main portion of Paul's speech (17:24-26,29) contains a strong critique of idolatry. This view is aptly summed up by Gempf:

"It is wrong to try to locate the Creator of all in a building fashioned by humans (17:24). It is wrong to try to give gifts to the giver of life (17:25). It is wrong to try to identify the God who created all nations with any particular city (17:26 ...). And finally, it is wrong to think that the one who gives life to people can be something that itself has no life, but is shaped by human hands (17:29)."²¹⁹

²¹⁴ See esp. Zweck 1989.

²¹⁵ Bruce 1988:335. This, however, only seems to have applied to the formal court sessions. So, from the perspective of the oratees, unless Paul "is a fool or exceedingly arrogant, he must be complimenting them" (Given 1995:365).

²¹⁶ See Weiser 1985:467; Schneider, G. 1982:237-238; Conzelmann 1987:140; and Larsson 1987: 386.

²¹⁷ See Krodel 1986:330; Roloff 1981:259; Pesch 1986:136; and Marshall 1980: 285.

²¹⁸ Zweck 1989:102. See also Given 1995:364-365 and 4.4.1.

²¹⁹ Gempf 1993a:52. Gempf's interpretation of 17:26b represents one of two approaches, taking it as denoting 'the order of history' in contrast to 'the order of creation'. See the textual comments on 17:26 in 4.4.2.2 on the interpretation of this highly disputed phrase.

This understanding and critique of idolatry, which has been seen (by commentators) as either highly simplistic or highly sophisticated, will be assessed in 4.4.2.3 and 5.3.

3.4.3.2 *Paul's use of the altar*

Previously in this chapter (see 3.3.2.2), the question of the historical authenticity of the altar 'To an unknown god' was discussed. In this context the focus is on Paul's use of this altar inscription in the overall argument. The commentators agree that the most striking aspect of Paul's interaction with the Athenian religious audience clearly was his daring use of the Athenian altar 'To an unknown god' (17:23) in the speech.²²⁰ The commentators have tried to uncover the key to this Pauline strategy, and have come up with a series of suggestions.

1. Larsson seems representative of many scholars when he suggests that Paul's main point, when using this specific altar, seems to be to establish a point of contact ("what you worship", indicating a pantheistic view of God, 17:23b), in order to be able to present the biblical truth about God (as being truly personal, 17:24ff).²²¹

2. Many scholars emphasize what seems to many to be the most obvious reason, that the altar was (or at least could be interpreted as) an admission of religious ignorance, and

²²⁰ Larsson calls this the most surprising and shocking element in this speech! (See Larsson 1987:392.)

²²¹ Larsson 1987:387-388.

possibly even an expression of religious openness.²²² It has been pointed out "that what Paul picked out for comment was the Athenians' open acknowledgement of their ignorance, and that 'the ignorance rather than the worship is thus underscored' ".²²³ The ambiguity of the inscription is well expressed by Krodel:

"Paul suggests that by erecting this altar with this inscription the Athenians themselves announced the failure of polytheism and its cults to come to terms with the deity of God. Simultaneously this inscription expresses a hunch, a vague notion that the reality of God, his deity, is to be found beyond all pagan cults, temples, and religious efforts. Thus the inscription marks the place where the Athenians are open for knowledge of the true God, where they are truly 'religious' ".²²⁴

3. Skarsaune suggests that Paul used the Athenian altar's indication of religious ignorance for a quite specific purpose. This particular altar (admitting ignorance about God) would implicitly have functioned as a devastating critique of all the other altars (claiming knowledge about the gods). This would imply that the Lucan Paul in Athens followed the Socratic philosophical tradition in its critique of religion as idolatry.²²⁵

²²² See Krodel 1986:331; Roloff 1981:260; and Weiser 1985:468.

²²³ Stott 1990:285. Stott's reference is to Stonehouse 1949:19.

²²⁴ Krodel 1986:331.

²²⁵ See Skarsaune 1996:589-597 and Skarsaune 1998:130-136. This plausible suggestion is made on the basis of a careful comparison between Paul (in Acts 17) and Justin Martyr (esp. in *1. Apol.* 5.1-4 and *2. Apol.* 10.4-8).

4. Quite a few commentators mention the background story in Diogenes Laertius *Vit.*

1.110.²²⁶ The most promising use of this background material is found in Gempf, who emphasizes 'safety precaution' as yet another aspect of why Paul used this altar:

"More significant is the way that the practice of this anonymous worship was linked to themes central to Paul's speech: besides being an indication of religiousness, it also is clearly presented by Diogenes Laertius as a 'safety precaution'. The thinking was that if the gods were not properly venerated they would strike the city. Hence, lest they inadvertently invoke the wrath of some god in their ignorance of him or her, the city set up these altars to unknown gods (Diogenes 1.110-113). Both the admission of ignorance and the desire to avoid divine catastrophe are used to great effect by Paul in his speech."²²⁷

These different suggestions regarding 'the altar to an unknown god' should probably be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. Paul used the ambiguous altar inscription to introduce key interlocking topics ('admission of ignorance'; 'critique of idolatry'; 'desire to avoid divine catastrophe'). These topics functioned - explicitly or implicitly - as crucial points of contact for Paul's argument (see further 4.4 and 5.2.2.1).

3.4.4 *The philosophical context*

Luke's account of the Areopagus Speech is clearly set in the pluralistic, philosophical context of ancient Athens. This is the background for the intensive contemporary scholarly discussions concerning a) Paul's relationship to the natural theology of Epicureanism and

²²⁶ See e.g. Hemer 1989a:117 and Bruce 1990a:380-381.

²²⁷ Gempf 1993a:51.

Stoicism, b) the *traditionshistorische* background to the individual elements of the speech, and c) the possible usage of Socratic traditions in the Lucan account.

3.4.4.1 Epicureanism and Stoicism

The commentators seem, to a large extent, to be in substantial agreement concerning the content and character of Epicurean and Stoic philosophy. These Hellenistic philosophies can be summarized as follows:²²⁸

1. Epicureanism was founded by Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) as a basically materialistic worldview²²⁹, based on the atomic theory of Democritus. The Epicurean philosophy, e.g. as taught by Lucretius in *Nat.* (1st cent. B.C.), had its appeal mainly in the higher classes and could be summarized as follows: a) They argued in a deistic and polytheistic fashion about the gods being so far away from the world as to exercise no influence in its affairs. b) The world was seen to be the result of chance (the random motion and combination of atomic particles). c) Death was considered to be the end of all existence, and therefore there would be no judgment. d) They held, therefore, that pleasure (*hedone*; not a sensualist but a lofty view of pleasure) was the chief end of life, esp. a life of tranquillity (*ataraxia*) with no pain, disturbing passions or superstitious fears. The following motto is thus an

²²⁸ Key summaries of Epicurean and Stoic philosophies are found in Allen, D. 1985:64-70; Bruce 1990a:376-377; Croy 2000; Graeser 1995; Paige 1993:714-715; Striker 1995; Thom 2000; and Watson 1994:42-51.

²²⁹ Epicurus is mentioned, together with Democritus and Lucretius, as one of the exponents of “naturalism as a metaphysical program ... before the development of modern science” in Koons 2000:62. See also Thiselton 1995:122.

appropriate summary of Epicureanism: "Nothing to fear in God; Nothing to feel in death; Good [pleasure] can be attained; Evil [pain] can be endured."²³⁰

2. Stoicism was founded by the Cypriot Zeno of Zitium (340-265 B.C.), by Cleanthes (331-233 B.C.) and by Chrysippus (c. 280-207 B.C.). It gradually developed into a basically pantheistic (or "panentheistic"²³¹) worldview. The name was taken from the *Stoa Poikile* (i.e. the painted colonnade or portico) in the Athenian *agora* where Zeno taught habitually. One famous Stoic in the first century was Paul's contemporary Seneca (4 B.C. – A.D. 65; see 3.2.1). The Stoic philosophy had become very popular at the time of Paul and could be summarized as follows: a) They argued in a pantheistic fashion that God was the world soul, or, Logos, the inherent Reason of the Universe. b) Since God to the Stoics was the world soul, everything that happened was the will of God. Therefore all things must be accepted, as they are, without resentment. c) Their teaching focused on living in harmony with nature as well as an emphasis on the rational abilities of humankind and the self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) of the individual. d) The ethical teaching of Stoicism was, at its best, characterized by moral earnestness and a high sense of duty. The chief end of Stoicism, however, was *apatheia*, not *sympatheia*.

Commentators have pointed out that Stoicism was known for its emphasis on arguments for the existence of the divine. Watson mentions various Stoic 'natural

²³⁰ This motto was written about A.D. 200 by Diogenes, an Epicurean, and is quoted in Witherington 1998:514.

²³¹ Witherington 1998:514.

theology' arguments, showing that the argument from the design of the universe to an intelligent designer of the universe (i.e. the teleological argument) seems to have been common. "The logical development of that [argument] is the argument from God's providence. This was a topic of which the Stoics were particularly fond."²³² Winter draws attention to what seems to have been "a standard Stoic *apologia* on the immortality of the gods... 'first they prove that the gods exist; next they explain their nature; then they show that the world is governed by them; and lastly, that they care for the fortunes of mankind'."²³³

3. Barrett has pointed out that "Stoics and Epicureans resembled one another more closely than either party would allow. Both saw that in a chaotic world the only way to peace was the disciplining of desire".²³⁴ Witherington observes that both schools were "essentially materialists ... [and both] emphasized "the rational over the emotional".²³⁵ A further point of contact between the two schools is mentioned by Winter. He points to the fact that both Stoicism and Epicureanism "had adopted the principle of accommodation of their beliefs with popular religion for their followers...[, since they] had to endorse religious pluralism if they were to maintain their following, given the growing cult of the veneration of the

²³² Watson 1994:47. See also Winter 1991:119-121.

²³³ Winter 1991:118. The quote is from Balbus' debate with opposing philosophical schools c. 77-78 in Cicero *Nat. Deor.* II.3. According to Diogenes Laertius, *Zeno* VII.148. leading Stoics such as Cleanthes, Chrysippos and Posidonius all produced works on natural theology. (See Winter 1991:118.)

²³⁴ Barrett 1987:78.

²³⁵ Witherington 1998:514. See also Martin, L. 1987:36-37.

deceased emperor as one of the ways of affirming loyalty to the Principate"²³⁶. These key observations by commentators regarding *a common ground between Stoicism and Epicureanism* must be kept in mind when considering Paul's approach in Athens.

The preceding outline of Epicurean and Stoic beliefs, as presented in the contemporary discussion, leads naturally to a discussion of Paul's engagement with these philosophies.

3.4.4.2 *The 'traditionshistorische' background to ambivalent allusions in the speech*

Most writers seem to agree on the presence of ambivalent allusions in the main portion of Paul's speech (17:24-29). These could refer either to Hellenistic philosophy or to the Hebrew Bible and Hellenistic Judaism. Some commentators (following Dibelius) emphasize the Hellenistic philosophical background²³⁷, whereas others (following Gärtner) argue for a predominantly Old Testament and Jewish background²³⁸. *This exegetical debate should be decided preliminarily on the basis of a discussion on Paul's strategy (see 3.4.4.3 and 3.5) and finally on the basis of a critical exposition of the text itself (see chapter 4).*

The following list gives the most relevant background references (including references to parallel material in contemporary and later sources) to the ambiguous statements in

²³⁶ Winter 1991:126-127; see also Winter 1994b:97 and Winter 2000:292-293.

²³⁷ See e.g. Haenchen 1977; Conzelmann 1987; and Balch 1990.

²³⁸ See e.g. Larsson 1987; Hemer 1989b; Bruce 1990a; and Gempf 1994.

17:24-29, as it is presented in the recent debate.²³⁹

- 17:24a: “God who made the world and everything in it.” This could refer to Is. 42:5²⁴⁰; Ex. 20:11; Wis. 9:9; 2 Macc. 7:23 and/or Plato *Tim.* 28C;76C; Epictetus 4.7.6.

- 17:24b: “God does not live in temples built by hands.” This could refer to 1 Kings 8:27; Is. 66:1 and/or Plutarch *Mor.* 1034b.

- 17:25a: “He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything.” This could refer to Ps. 50:10-12; Mic. 6:6-8; 2 Macc. 14:35; *T. Naph.* 1:6 and/or Plato *Tim.* 33D, 34B; Euripides *Herc.fur.* 1345-46.

- 17:25b: “God himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.” This could refer to Gen. 2:7; Is. 42:5; Neh. 9:6; 2 Macc. 7:23 and/or *Corp. Herm.* 5:10; Euripides *Herc.fur.* 1345f.

- 17:26a: “From one man he made every nation of men.” This could refer to Gen.1:27-28 and/or Hellenistic myths about primeval man.

- 17:26b: “That they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.” If about history of nations, this might refer to: Deut. 32:8; Dan. 2:21ff; 4:37; 7:12,25. If about seasons of the year, this might refer to: Job 38:4-12; Ps. 74:12-17; Jer. 5:22; 31:35; 1 QM IX:12f; 1QH I:13f,19. The Hellenistic background (in either case) is Plato *Leges* X:886a; Cicero *Tusc.* 1.26.68; Virgil

²³⁹ This list is primarily based on Morland 1994:249-250; Larsson 1987:388-392; Bruce 1990a:382-387; Pesch 1986:136-140; and Hemer 1989a:118. See also Charles 2000.

²⁴⁰ It has been suggested that “the ministry in Athens ought to be regarded, as far as Paul is concerned, in the light of the prophetic role of Jesus of Nazareth, the Servant of Yahweh of Isaiah 42/49; that Paul consistently viewed his own apostleship to the Gentiles in terms of the Isaiah passages, via his personal commission from the risen Jesus; and that the speech of Acts 17 finds its

Geor. 1:237f.

- 17:27a: "God did so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him." This could refer to Is. 45:19; Ps. 14:2 and/or Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 12:60.
- 17:27b: "though God is not far from each one of us." This could refer to Ps. 139:7-10 and/or Seneca *Ep.* 41.1.
- 17:28a: "For in him we live and move and have our being." It is possible that this is a Stoic formula, often attributed to Epimenides the Cretan (see Diogenes Laertius *Vit.* 1.110), but it also corresponds to Jewish critique of idolatry.
- 17:28b: "We are his offspring." This is a quote from the Stoic poet Aratus (*Phaen.* 5). It also corresponds to Gen. 1:26 and Aristobulus *fragm.* 4.
- 17:29: "... we should not think that the divine being is like gold, silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill." This could refer to Ps. 115:4; 135:15; Is. 40:18-19; Wis. 13-15 and/or Plutarch *Mor.* 167d-f.

This list of background references, then, demonstrates that a number of statements in Paul's speech could be interpreted as Jewish and/or Hellenistic. This implies that the crucial question, for the interpreters, is the normative background and framework for these ideas when used by Paul.²⁴¹ Three major alternatives are presented in the contemporary

motivation in this special self-consciousness of the Apostle Paul" (Fudge 1971:198).

²⁴¹ It remains an open question both how much Paul actually knew of Greek culture in general and of Athenian culture specifically and where he had acquired this knowledge. Bruce points out that although the apostle was born in Tarsus, a Greek centre of learning, "it was probably at a later stage that he acquired the measure of literary knowledge and Stoic thought that is attested in his writings and speeches" (Bruce 1993:682; see also Légasse 1995:373-376). Hemer's judgment seems wise: "We cannot now specify how far Paul's knowledge of the intricacies of Athenian

discussion:

1) Paul used these ideas in a Hellenistic way, and therefore the speech should be seen as a syncretistic speech. Some recent commentators argue that Paul should be seen as presenting orthodox Stoicism, which is said to be different from the Stoics of the first century since they had assimilated to the practices of popular Athenian religion. This interpretation of the Areopagus Speech also implies that Paul took the Stoic side against the Epicureans, thus creating a division among the audience (17:32).²⁴² This 'liberal' view of the speech has been seriously challenged²⁴³, however, both in terms of its inadequate understanding of Stoicism and its inadequate interpretation of the speech.

2) Paul used the ideas in an exclusively Jewish-Christian way. The correlation of Jewish-Christian and Hellenistic ideas should therefore be seen as merely superficial, coincidental or just phonetic. This 'conservative' view of the speech appears in different versions, including some more popular ones.²⁴⁴ This view, however, seems to run counter to the textual evidence.²⁴⁵

3) By establishing legitimate 'points of continuity and contact', Paul is able to explore the ambiguity of these references in order to present the authentic Christian Gospel. This view

tradition extended, but it suffices to show that he had struck some significant vein of the richer hidden complex." (Hemer 1989b:246)

²⁴² See Malherbe 1989:152; Balch 1990; Neyrey 1990; and more recently Croy 1997 and Hansen 1998:310-313.

²⁴³ See esp. Winter 1991:117-130.

²⁴⁴ See esp. Valen-Sendstad, A. 1995b. Gärtner's classical treatment of the Areopagus Speech has *some* affinities to this position.

²⁴⁵ See Hemer 1989a and Winter 1991: cf. the discussion in 4.4.

claims that Paul is engaged in an apologetic dialogue with the Hellenistic philosophers (see 3.4.4.3).

3.4.4.3 'Polemical engagement'²⁴⁶ through an 'apologetic dialogue'

The Areopagus Speech presents the interpreter with certain basic ambiguities. The speech is thus characterized *both* by the use of ambiguous religious expressions of Hellenistic and/or Jewish background *and* by the use of some forensic language even though the setting should not be seen as an adversarial trial. *A theological understanding of the speech as apologetics, however, seems to provide the reader with a plausible key to these ambiguities.*²⁴⁷

Hemer suggested such a reading in 1989, when he coined the phrase 'apologetic dialogue' about the Areopagus Speech:

"The speech may be understood as apologetic dialogue directed successively to the classes of interlocutors represented among the hearers, the representatives of Stoicism, Epicureanism and Athenian religion. Yet the speech is not structured in any such way. It reads more like an abbreviation which has consolidated the three lines of argument to a presentation of Christ within which the elements of the response to different misunderstandings are included together."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ The term 'polemical engagement' is found in Wright 1997:80-83.

²⁴⁷ The ambiguities are outlined in 3.4.2 and 3.4.4.2. See also Morland 1994:248-251.

²⁴⁸ Hemer 1989b:243. Barrett suggested a similar approach in 1974: "Paul finds Athens in the grip of popular, superstitious religion. This bears witness to both elements in the truth contained in the altar dedication, Ἀγνώστω θεῷ, there is a God, and men do not know him. Paul enlists the aid of the philosophers, using in the first place the rational criticism of the Epicureans to attack the folly and especially the idolatry of popular religion, and then the theism of the Stoics to establish (against the Epicureans) the immediate and intimate nearness of God, and man's obligation to follow the path of duty and of (true) religion, rather than that of pleasure. But all these propaedeutics come in the end under judgement: men must repent, for God has appointed a day in which he means to judge the world in righteousness, by a Man whom he has appointed, and raised from the dead (17:31)." (Barrett 1974:75) Surprisingly enough, however, there are no references to

Hemer argues that the basis for this understanding of the speech is found in observations such as these:²⁴⁹ Paul seems to expose an inconsistency in Stoic pantheism, which could be described as "the inconsistency between the transcendent reality to which their thinkers aspired and the man-made images of Athens"²⁵⁰. Paul did this by using their own terminology; e.g. their belief that God is the source of all life (17:25b) and a statement from Aratus, one of their poets (17:28). Paul also seems to argue against the polytheistic deism of the Epicureans by presenting God as creator (17:24), sustainer (17:25, using their own belief that the gods need nothing from men and cannot be served by men), and judge (17:30-31). Further, Paul's dialogue with popular Athenian religion is seen e.g. in his reference to their religiosity (17:22), but comes to a focus (in 17:28a and 17:31) "in the implied references to the traditions surrounding the Cretan seer Epimenides and the court of Areopagus itself"²⁵¹. In Hemer's words;

"The passage is a fascinating study in cross-cultural communication, in building bridges where possible without shirking the necessity of dialogue on points of basic disagreement, while seeking to meet those issues where the questioner is, on his own ground and terminology... And where Luke uses the terminology of Hellenistic philosophy, he is not putting in Paul's mouth words impossible for Paul; rather, the apologist is meeting his audience on their own ground to respond to them there, endorsing what he can in their terms, but effectually also submitting their ideas to a profound critique."²⁵²

Barrett's article in Hemer's 1989-studies on Acts 17:16-34.

²⁴⁹ See Hemer 1989b:243-248.

²⁵⁰ Hemer 1989b:244. It seems somewhat imprecise, though, by Hemer to use the term 'transcendent reality' about Stoic pan(en)theistic beliefs.

²⁵¹ Hemer 1989b:245. The references are to Diogenes Laertius *Vit.* 1.110-112 and Aeschylus *Eumen.* 647-648.

²⁵² Hemer 1989b:247,254.

Hemer's concepts of 'apologetic dialogue' and 'bridge-building' were carried further by Winter in 1991 - in his response to Balch and Neyrey - as an appropriate way of understanding Paul's interaction in his speech with the Stoics and the Epicureans. Winter identifies a series of common themes in Paul's speech, both in relation to Stoicism and to Epicureanism, as well as key elements of critique:

1. Five themes seem to have provided the background for Paul's dialogue with the Stoics.²⁵³ a) Paul might have used the Stoic apologetic 'natural theology outline' in order to present a Christian *apologia* on the nature of the one and true God (see 3.4.4.1).²⁵⁴ b) The nature of the unknown God (17:23) was introduced in the light of the misunderstanding concerning 'Jesus and the Resurrection' (17:18) and the Stoic interchangeable use of 'god' in singular and plural. c) Paul relates to the Stoic pantheistic view of the divine in order to introduce God as truly personal (17:23-24). d) The Stoic view of providence "provided an important link and it was here that he was able to find significant common ground as he moved to his thesis on the knowable God and Jesus and his resurrection".²⁵⁵ (See 17:25-28.) e) The theme of judgment (17:31) would also have been a point where there was some common ground between Paul and the Stoics.

2. Four themes provided common ground between Paul and the Epicureans²⁵⁶: a) The gods

²⁵³ Winter 1991:118-122.

²⁵⁴ Winter points out that "the summary in Acts 17 certainly deals with the nature of God as creator of the world who is Lord of heaven and earth (v. 24a), it affirms he gives life and all things to all his creation (v. 25b), and his providential care is intrinsically bound up with the needs of all mankind (v. 26)" (Winter 1991:118).

²⁵⁵ Winter 1991:122.

²⁵⁶ Winter 1991:123-124. Winter's concluding comment seems appropriate: "While areas of agreement for Paul with the Stoics would have been far greater, consensus on four doctrines is

are 'living, immortal and blessed' (17:24-29; see also 1 Thess. 1:9, Rom. 1:23, 1 Tim. 1:11 and Diogenes Laertius *Epicurus* X.139-154). b) The knowledge of the divine was manifest (17:23b; see also Diogenes Laertius *Epicurus* X.123). c) God does/the gods do not live in man-made temples (17:24b). d) God has/the gods have no need of anything (17:25).

3. Winter emphasizes further that Paul, in his critique of idolatry, challenged both Stoics and Epicureans, since both philosophical schools had endorsed religious pluralism and adopted the principle of accommodation towards popular religion (cf. 3.4.4.1). "The notional caveats which they provided for their adherents enabled the latter to participate in cultic activities. It shows the uneasy but obviously necessary *rapprochement* they felt that they had to reach with it."²⁵⁷

Hemer and Winter's approach to the Areopagus Speech seems both valid and helpful. Paul's use of ambiguous religious concepts and expressions could thus be seen as apologetic devices in order to establish legitimate 'points of continuity and contact' for the communication of the Gospel.²⁵⁸ This perspective also indicates that Paul actually was using the philosophers' own arguments and their own poets to uncover their pragmatic accommodation to the religious pluralism of the day.²⁵⁹ *It seems thus plausible to describe*

sufficient to reject Neyrey's thesis that Luke has Paul siding with the Stoics against his stereotyped Epicureans." (Winter 1991:124 *contra* Neyrey 1990) It is surprising that Hansen 1998:312-313, in spite of references to the evidence presented by Winter, still sticks to Neyrey's thesis. It is also remarkable that Croy 1997, who argues along the same lines as Neyrey, makes no reference neither to Hemer's nor to Winter's discussions.

²⁵⁷ Winter 1991:126.

²⁵⁸ See further 5.2.2.1.

²⁵⁹ Paul seems thus to be saying: "You are guilty – of allowing idolatry – on your own

*Paul's approach to Stoicism and Epicureanism in Acts 17 as 'polemical engagement' through an apologetic dialogue.*²⁶⁰

3.4.4.4 Paul depicted as a Christian Socrates?

There seem to have been an extensive use of the Socratic tradition in antiquity, both in the Graeco-Roman world in general and by Greek philosophy in particular. A crucial issue facing the commentators, then, is whether Luke, implicitly or explicitly, is using the Socratic tradition in Acts 17:16-34 in order to "portray Paul as a new Socrates for his Greek audience"²⁶¹.

A number of recent commentators would agree with the claim that "the prelude to the Areopagus Speech depicts Paul according to the model of Socrates".²⁶² There are three textual features in 17:16-21 that are emphasized by many commentators as possible Socratic allusions: a) the comment about foreign gods, b) the description of the Athenian scene and c) the rhetorical technique being used.²⁶³

a) The only undisputed reference to the Socratic tradition in the prelude to the speech is the comment on foreign gods (17:18), where the actual wording reflects the Socratic

grounds!"

²⁶⁰ See further chapter 5.

²⁶¹ Keener 1993:373.

²⁶² Sandnes 1993:20. See also Bruce 1988:330; Larsson 1987:384; Marshall 1980: 283-284; Pesch 1986:134; Roloff 1981:257; Stott 1990:280; and Weiser 1985:458.

²⁶³ Sandnes 1993:21.

tradition.²⁶⁴ The question is, though, what this actually meant at the time of Paul, a point which seems to have been neglected by most commentators. Kvalbein shows that the Greek philosophers at this time were arguing about Socrates, the Stoics treating him as a 'hero' whereas the Epicureans saw him as a 'fool'.²⁶⁵ Neither of the philosophical schools would therefore consider a reference to the accusations against Socrates as a serious charge which would result in a formal trial. These observations strengthen the case for not seeing the Areopagus setting as an adversarial trial (see also 3.4.2).

b) and c). Socrates and Paul are both depicted as using the *agora* (or the market-place) as the scene for their activity in Athens, talking to casual passers-by (17:17b). The rhetorical strategy used in this *agora* context by Socrates, as well as by the Lucan Paul, was dialogue (17:17). Many commentators tend to interpret both these aspects as being implicit Socratic allusions. This depends, however, on the overall approach to the text.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Sandnes 1993:21-22. See Plato *Apol.* 24b-c.

²⁶⁵ Kvalbein 1982:91-92.

²⁶⁶ Given suggests that there is a conscious link between the ambiguities and the Socratic allusions in the Lucan account:

"In light of the well known Stoic pretensions to dialectical mastery and expertise in detecting ambiguities and sophisms, as well as the equally well known shortcomings of the Epicureans in such matters, Luke's casting of Paul in the role of Socrates, the returned father of dialectic can hardly be coincidental or innocent. In the opening encounter in the agora, his point is not simply to link Paul with Socrates as one who dialogues, but also to portray the Athenian philosophers as grossly misunderstanding Paul's message as the proclamation of a new god and goddess precisely through their failure to disambiguate *anastasis*. In the speech, Luke's point is not simply to link Paul with Socrates as one who appeared before the Athenian court, but also to portray the Athenian intellectuals as victims of sophistic verbal cunning through their failure to recognize Paul's 'wickedly sophisticated use of ambiguity', to borrow Guthrie's expression." (Given 1996:350)

There are clearly some key elements of truth in Givens' analysis, *but he takes it too far when describing the Lucan Paul as a 'sophist'*. As shown in 3.3.3.2, mainly on the basis of Winter 1997b, Paul consciously and consistently seems to have adopted an anti-sophistic stance.

Sandnes extends the possible Socratic parallels to the speech itself²⁶⁷, emphasizing that "Paul, like the philosopher, starts from the position of his audience. Furthermore, he closes in an indirect and surprising way, thus leaving his audience in doubt: 'who is this man mentioned at the end of the speech?'. "²⁶⁸ This perspective on the speech (see also 3.5.1.4) seems to be *both legitimate and suggestive* and has apparently not yet been seriously challenged by other commentators.

3.5 The Question of Paul as Public Speaker in Athens: Orator and Missionary

3.5.1 Paul as orator in Athens

3.5.1.1 The rhetorical context

Commentators unanimously agree that the Lucan account describes Paul as a public speaker in Athens.²⁶⁹ Winter claims that Paul was asked to present 'a declamation speech' when facing the Areopagus Council. The basis for this argument is found in the following observations from the text: a) The actual invitation given to Paul was to present his teaching as a 'herald of strange gods' (17:19-20; see 3.4.2.3); b) The nominated topic was 'Jesus and resurrection' (17:18-19); c) The Στραθεῖς δε of 17:22 opens up the possibility

²⁶⁷ Witherington makes an additional point, mentioning that Luke's portrayal of Paul in 17:25a seems reminiscent of Plato's description of how Socrates "had discussed whether human service to the gods was possible or not (*Euthyphro* 12 E – 15 E)" (Witherington 1998:525).

²⁶⁸ Sandnes 1993:24.

²⁶⁹ It was argued in 3.3.3 that this Lucan description was appropriate for Paul as the alleged

of a gap between the nomination of the topic and the actual delivery of the speech²⁷⁰; d) The beginning of Paul's speech follows the conventional pattern of the *exordium* (17:22-23a), leading up to the *propositio* (17:23b). This means that Paul was "being given the opportunity to establish his credentials as a speaker ... in the same way that any public orator often was invited to do ... when he came to a city in the East in the 1st century".²⁷¹

This emphasis on Paul as a public speaker in Athens leads naturally to a brief evaluation of recent discussions on the rhetorical genre, structure and strategy of Paul's speech. The rhetorical exegetical approach "seeks to explore the argumentative strategy and persuasive power of discourse"²⁷² and is very common among more recent studies on Acts 17:16-34.

3.5.1.2 *The rhetorical genre*

Classical rhetorical textbooks refer to three kinds of speeches: forensic, deliberative and epideictic.²⁷³ Recent rhetorical studies of the Areopagus Speech seem to be unanimous

speaker.

²⁷⁰ Winter makes the plausible suggestion, that "the normal convention of a day's grace was ... allowed in order [for Paul] to prepare his 'declamation' on the nominated topic of 'Jesus and resurrection' (Acts 17:19). It would be composed and memorised to be presented the following day. Such speeches could be published and it is known that they were circulated in Athens." (Winter 1991:114)

²⁷¹ Winter 1991:114. See also Winter 1996.

²⁷² Yeo 1994:75. This approach (which recently has become increasingly popular in New Testament studies) seems to be esp. appropriate in this context, since this text claims to be a recorded summary of a speech held in one of the major rhetorical centres of the Graeco-Roman world. There is no doubt that the Lucan account "uses devices of structure and emphasis appropriate to the elevated and literary rendering of a formal speech" (Hemer 1989b:256).

²⁷³ See esp. Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.3.1-4; Cicero *Her.* 1.2.2; and Quintillian *Inst. Orat.* 3.4.

in their analysis. The formal *forensic* category is seen as inappropriate in the light of the structure and content of the formal forensic speeches elsewhere in Acts.²⁷⁴ As shown in 3.4.2.3, however, this does not rule out a setting before the Council. The *epideictic* category is also seen as irrelevant, since Paul neither is “praising nor lamenting anyone”²⁷⁵. The *deliberative* category, however, is shown to fit the textual evidence in the Lucan account. Yeo provides a succinct summary: “The speech is deliberative because of the appeal the rhetor puts forward (v. 30) in order to change the course of action of the audience. Second, the time referent is predominantly future. Thirdly, the *topoi* concern what is advantageous and expedient to the audience.”²⁷⁶ *This would imply, then, that the deliberative category is the appropriate rhetorical genre for the Areopagus Speech.*²⁷⁷

3.5.1.3 The rhetorical structure

Yeo offers a detailed and plausible analysis of the rhetorical structure of the Areopagus Speech as a deliberative speech. His analysis can be summarized as follows:²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ On forensic speeches in Acts, see 2.2.3.

²⁷⁵ Sandnes 1993:14.

²⁷⁶ Yeo 1994:83. Satterthwaite argues accordingly that “Paul’s speech in Acts 17:22-31 emerges as a textbook example of a deliberative speech: proem (v.22, seeking to secure audience goodwill); narration (v.23a, giving background); division (again a single proposition: I will tell you of this God you worship as unknown, v.23b); demonstration (God as incomparably greater than idols, vv.24-29); peroration (vv.30-31)” (Satterthwaite 1993:360).

²⁷⁷ Kennedy 1984 launched this approach, and a number of commentators have followed: Zweck 1989; Morgenthaler 1993:331-332; Sandnes 1993; Satterthwaite 1993; and Yeo 1994. (See also Powell 1991:96-99.)

²⁷⁸ See Yeo 1994:77-80. This analysis seems dependent on Zweck 1989, but is more detailed and covers the whole speech.

1. 17:22 *Exordium* (or *proem*), with address (v. 22 a) and *captatio benevolentiae* (v. 22b).
2. 17:23 *Narratio*, with *narratio* proper (v. 23a) and *partitio* or *thesis* (v. 23b).
3. 17:24-29 *Probatio* (or *pistis* or *confirmatio*), with three 'proofs': a) First proof (vv. 24-25): Nature of God as maker (v. 24) and sustainer (v. 25) in relation to the World; b) Second proof (vv. 26-27a): Providence of God to Humankind as maker (v. 26a) and determiner (v. 26b) with divine purposes (v. 27a); c) Third proof (vv. 27b-29): Affinity of humanity to God since God is immanent (v. 27b), with *chreia* or *iudicatum* (v. 28) and first *adfectus* (appeal) with *comminatio* (v. 29).
4. 17:30-31 *Peroratio* (or *conclusio*), with *recapitulatio* with first *adfectus* (appeal) in *expolitio* (a refined restatement; v. 30a), second *adfectus* (v. 30b), and rationale for appeal (v. 31).

Yeo's detailed rhetorical outline is a stimulating and attractive attempt to analyse Paul's overall argumentative structure in his speech. This outline seems to be preferable to an alternative outline offered by Sandnes, where the *exordium* is 17:22b-28 and 17:29-31 constitutes the *propositio*. The problem with this latter analysis is that 17:22b-28 seems to carry more weight than just being an *exordium*.²⁷⁹ The major divisions of Yeo's outline are

²⁷⁹ This is recognized in Morland 1994:265. The analyses presented by Zweck and Yeo are similar to the analyses in e.g. Krodel 1986:329; Larsson 1987:382; Roloff 1981:257; Pesch 1986:132; and Weiser 1985:456. As will be shown in the exegesis of 17:22-28 in 4.4.1-4.4.2, this majority view seems to fit the textual evidence better.

representative of most of the recent rhetorical studies and will be used - to a large extent²⁸⁰ – as a framework for the detailed exposition of the speech in chapter 4.²⁸¹

3.5.1.4 *The rhetorical strategy*

The rhetorical strategy suggested by Sandnes seems much more promising for the understanding of Acts 17:16-34 than his rhetorical outline (see 3.5.1.3). He claims that Paul, when facing the curious and critical audience in Athens, used an appropriate rhetorical strategy called *insinuatio* (i.e. a subtle approach), where the immediate aim was “to promote curiosity and elicit questions”²⁸². The textual basis for this approach is found in the following observations: a) This indirect strategy is reminiscent of Socrates, which could explain the possible use of the Socratic tradition in 17:16-21 (see 3.4.4.4); b) The *insinuatio* strategy is a plausible way of explaining the surprisingly cryptic way of introducing Jesus as in 17:31; c) This strategy is also a plausible key to the responses to the speech mentioned in 17:32-34, where especially the wish for more information (in v. 32b) fits the supposed aim of promoting curiosity and eliciting questions. *This suggested rhetorical strategy, then, seems to fit the textual evidence.* Chapters 4 and 5 will show the validity of this analysis.

²⁸⁰ Yeo’s detailed outline of the *probatio* seems less convincing than his overall structure of the speech. See further 4.4.2.

²⁸¹ See further chapter 4.

²⁸² Sandnes 1993:26. He refers to Cicero *Her.* 1.6.9-10 and Quintillian *Inst. Orat.* 4.1.42-50 for the *insinuatio* approach, arguing that the *insinuatio* “will in an indirect way attract the attention of this [critical] audience, if necessary even by applying concealment” (Sandnes 1993:15).

3.5.2 Paul as missionary speaker in Athens

3.5.2.1 A 'missionary speech'

Given the importance of the rhetorical dimensions of the text (see 3.5.1), many commentators agree that the focus in Luke's account is on Paul as a Christian speaker in this specific context. As indicated in 2.2.3, the Areopagus Speech has often been described as one of the 'missionary speeches' or ('missionary sermons') in Acts. This is not a formal literary category, but the description 'missionary speech' relates to the explicit evangelistic purpose of these speeches, in contrast to the formal defence speeches and hortatory speeches.²⁸³ The focus of this section is the attempts in the contemporary discussion to compare and contrast the Areopagus Speech with other 'missionary speeches' in Acts.

Many commentators stress the *dissimilarities* between the Areopagus Speech and the other speeches. Jervell represents this strand of thought: "But this speech is more or less a foreign body within Acts, not a typical missionary speech, and from the point of composition and structure no lines lead from this speech to other parts of Acts."²⁸⁴ Larsson points out, however, that there seems to be *a basic similarity in structure among the 'missionary speeches' in general*, though they were addressed to widely different audiences. He presents the following list of identical elements, when comparing Peter's

²⁸³ See e.g. Bailey, J. & Vander Broek, L. 1992:167; Bruce 1990a:34-40; Hvalvik 1992: Hemer 1989a:415-427; and Morland 1994:251.

²⁸⁴ Jervell 1984:17. The scenes in Lystra and Athens, however, are "not to be seen as isolated exceptions to a general rule" (Marshall 2000:108).

speech on the day of Pentecost with Paul's speech in Athens:²⁸⁵

- a) Peter and Paul both addresses the audiences (2:14 and 17:22a).
- b) Peter and Paul both relates their message to the specific situations (2:16-21 and 17:22b-23).
- c) Peter and Paul both presents the Christian message in three basic parts: *First*, a summary of the acts of God and/or Jesus (2:22-24 and 17:24-28a) is given. *Secondly*, proofs from the Old Testament (2:25-36) or from Greek literature (17:28b) are introduced. *Thirdly*, an appeal is made to the audience about conversion (2:37-40 and 17:29-31).
- d) In both cases, Luke mentions the results of the speech (2:41 and 17:32-34).

This list of connecting observations is significant, since it clearly links the Areopagus Speech to a key 'missionary speech' to the Jews.²⁸⁶ It seems to be generally recognized among the commentators, however, that despite the similarities noted above, *the speeches to Gentiles* in Acts 14:15-17 and 17:22-31 stand out as quite unique among the 'missionary speeches' in terms of approach and emphasis. This means that the closest parallel to the studied presentation in Athens is found in the hurried speech in Lystra. In an illuminating article, Gempf identifies some of the *common* features between these two passage as a) a pagan audience, b) various misunderstandings, c) idolatry, d) conversion and e) God as Creator and Sustainer.²⁸⁷ There seems, however, to be a *difference* in emphasis between the

²⁸⁵ Larsson 1987:382; cf. also Green, J. 1997:11 and Larsson 2001:79.

²⁸⁶ From this perspective - as argued in 3.3.3.1 - a passage like 1 Thess.1:9-10 serve as an important key to its interpretation.

²⁸⁷ Gempf 1995. This comparison may shed new light on pagan misunderstandings: "The Athenians imagine two new gods, while the Lystrans think they are seeing two old ones! Could

speech in Lystra and the speech in Athens. Craig mentions the explicit emphasis in Acts 14:17 on inferential reasoning on the basis of the created order: “Moreover, Acts 14:17 states that although God let the Gentiles go their own way, still he did not leave them *amartyron*, that is without evidence or witness, which is constituted by the created order.”²⁸⁸ On the other hand, the emphasis in Acts 17 – as indicated by Winter (see 3.4.4.3) – seems to be to argue for the plausibility of a Judeo-Christian natural theology over and against competing natural theologies.

3.5.2.2 *A role model for mission?*

Larsson suggests that Luke included the Areopagus Speech in the Book of Acts in order to provide his readers with a missionary model for evangelism among pagans.²⁸⁹ On the basis of such suggestions, Morland has attempted to express Paul's missionary strategy in Athens. He emphasizes the following crucial aspects:²⁹⁰ a) Paul introduced himself in a positive way to catch the attention of the audience (17:22b in contrast to 17:16); b) Paul used the pagan altar inscription (17:23a) and the quotation from the pagan poet Aratus

Luke be warning his readers of ways in which pagans misunderstand?” (Stott 1990:282; referring to a comment from C. Gempf in a private communication.)

²⁸⁸ Craig in Cowan 2000:40.

²⁸⁹ Larsson 1987:393. See also Bruce 1977:47. It has been suggested that Luke's intentions in this passage should be summed up as: “(1) to communicate the Christian message to his readers in the language of the audience, utilizing pagan categories to express the reality of divine revelation; (2) to build on pagan concepts through illustration, both philosophical and literary; (3) to adjust pagan assumptions in the light of biblical revelation (viz., via creation, transcendence, and self-disclosure); (4) to give evidence of God's self-disclosure (through the resurrection); and (5) to move toward the goal of repentance on the part of the reader through rhetorical persuasion.” (Charles 1995:53. He refers to Flender 1967:71-72.)

²⁹⁰ Morland 1994:252-255.

(17:28b) as argumentative starting-points; c) Paul's use of ambiguous statements (which, as shown in 3.4.4.2, could refer either to Greek literature and philosophy or to Old Testament/Jewish material) should probably be seen as intentional in order to establish possible points of contact; d) The basis for Paul's missionary or communicative strategy is found in the dual fact that God is close (17:27) and that the Athenians are God's "offspring" (17:28-29); e) While using aspects of the Athenians' beliefs as legitimate 'points of continuity and contact', Paul simultaneously modifies and corrects their basic view of God (17:24b-25a; 17:29); f) The main portion of the speech (17:24-29) seems to prepare the ground for the introduction of the distinctively Christian gospel in 17:30-31 (cf. also 17:23b). *These key observations* will be explored in depth in the exegetical discussion of these verses in chapter 4, as well as in the analysis and assessment of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics in chapter 5.

This approach to the speech *needs to be qualified* by the critical insights of some recent commentators. *First*, Liefeld stresses the importance of seeing Paul's approach in Athens in the context of the whole of Acts 17. Paul came to Athens as a refugee, without his missionary team, and seemingly with no explicit plan to reach out to Athens.

"Paul's speaking in the synagogue in Athens and engaging in discussions in the marketplace were not part of a planned gospel outreach but were a reaction to the pervasive idolatry that 'greatly distressed' him. A council meeting is the occasion of the speech itself, where Paul responds to an

inquiry as to his teachings. So Paul's mode of communication was suited to the occasion – not preaching, but explaining or teaching."²⁹¹

Secondly, Gempf criticizes the uncritical use of the speech by some contemporary missiologists, who treat the Areopagus Speech as a key example of a culturally sensitive 'Missionary Primer' in a pagan context.²⁹² Gempf makes a crucial point in relation to this missiological theory:

"In fact, perhaps the hardest thing to reconcile with the Missionary Primer theory is that there is no case in Acts in which we have an evangelistic 'first contact' sermon to pagan Gentiles. In both Lystra and Athens, as presumably elsewhere, Luke knows that the apostles gave such a message, but he only repeats the follow-up talk intended to clarify misunderstandings."²⁹³

Thus, the recorded 'missionary speech' in Athens was neither part of a long-term planned evangelistic outreach (but provoked) nor a 'Missionary Primer' *per se* (but the follow-up speech). *If the text is to be properly applied as a role model for mission (or for apologetics), this must be done with these key qualifications in mind.*

3.6 Conclusions

This concluding section has a dual function. *First*, it gives a *summary* of this chapter's critical assessment of the contemporary exegetical discussion on the authenticity of the

²⁹¹ Liefeld 1995:69.

²⁹² Gempf 1995:57-58. He refers esp. to Fernando 1987:33-35 and Hesselgrave 1991:233-234. Other examples would include Haacker 1988; Hempelmann 1998; Isizoh 1998; Manus 1985; and Richardson, D. 1984.

²⁹³ Gempf 1995:68.

account, the Athenian context, and Paul as a public speaker. *Secondly*, it constitutes a vital *background* for the subsequent, detailed exegetical study of the passage in chapter 4.

3.6.1 *The Question of the Authenticity of the Account*

The assessment in 3.3 on the contemporary discussion of the authenticity of Acts 17:16-34 indicated that various frameworks of interpretation play a key role and that the selection of a given framework needs to be properly justified.

This chapter has concluded, with Hemer, Bruce and Gempf (as prominent exponents of this view), that Luke's inevitable claims to historicity should include the account in Acts 17:16-34. This Lucan account has been shown to be appropriate both for Athens as the alleged situation (including the altar 'To an unknown god') and for Paul as the alleged speaker (in a comparison with his letters).²⁹⁴ This implies that the sceptical attitude (of Dibelius, Conzelmann and others) towards the authenticity of this text clearly seems unfounded. *It has thus been established, that the view that this Lucan account can be shown to be suitable (or appropriate) – both for Athens as the alleged situation and for Paul as the alleged speaker – is a plausible and valid exegetical framework. This framework, then, will be presupposed in the exegetical discussion in the next chapter.*

²⁹⁴ It was shown that *neither* the largely unresolved historical question of the altar 'To an unknown god' *nor* the theological relationship between this passage and relevant Pauline passages (such as 1 Thess. 1:9-10, 1 Cor. 2:1-5 and Rom. 1:18-23) constitute valid objections to treating the Lucan account as historical. This approach claims thus, with Blomberg: "Unless there is good reason for believing otherwise one will assume that a given detail in the work of a particular historian is factual" (Blomberg 1987:240). He adds, "This method places the burden of proof

3.6.2 *The Question of the Athenian Context*

The assessment in 3.4 of the contemporary discussion of questions related to the Athenian context (i.e. location, occasion, religion and philosophy) led to a number of conclusions.

It seems plausible (as Hemer argues) to locate the whole Athenian incident to the northwestern corner of the *agora*. Paul engaged in various discussions in the *agora* and was subsequently (as Winter has argued) invited to the Areopagus Council (in the *Stoa Basileios*) as a herald of foreign gods to explain his teachings. A majority of the commentators would at least agree in seeing the Areopagus Speech as something else than a judicial defence before the Council. As argued by Barrett, Hemer and Winter, Paul was using this occasion to engage critically with both Athenian idolaters (focusing on the various key dimension of the specific altar) and Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (in an apologetic dialogue with these worldviews). It is possible, as argued by Sandnes and others, that Luke (at least to some extent) may be alluding to Paul as a Christian Socrates. *It remains to be seen, however, whether the exegetical discussion in the next chapter will demonstrate the validity of these conclusions about the contemporary discussion of Acts 17:16-34 and the Athenian context.*

3.6.3 *The Question of Paul as Public and Missionary Speaker in Athens*

The assessment in 3.5 of the contemporary discussion of questions related to Paul as public and missionary speaker in Athens led to a number of conclusions.

The plausible view was adopted that the rhetorical context for Paul was as a public speaker before the Areopagus Council to be assessed as a herald of foreign gods (see 3.6.2). Before this curious and critical audience, Paul presented what recent rhetorical studies have identified as a deliberative speech. Yeo's plausible analysis of the overall rhetorical structure of Paul's deliberative speech was largely adopted, as well as Sandnes' attractive analysis of Paul's rhetorical strategy (to promote curiosity and elicit questions).

Most commentators seem to agree that the Lystra incident provides the closest parallel to the Athenian episode, but it has been shown (esp. by Larsson) that there also are similarities (in structure and content) between Acts 17 and Acts 2 (as a key example of a speech to Jews). Liefeld argues plausibly that Paul's speech should not be seen as part of a planned evangelistic outreach, but as a provoked speech. This is complemented by Gempf's key observation that the speech is a follow-up speech and not 'a missionary primer'.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the exegetical discussion in the next chapter will demonstrate the validity of these conclusions about the contemporary discussion of Paul as a public and missionary speaker in Athens.

4. AN EXPOSITION OF THE GREEK TEXT OF ACTS

17:16-34²⁹⁵

Outline:

4.1 Introducing the Chapter

4.2 Context, Text and Structure

4.3 The Introduction, 17:16-21

4.4 The Areopagus Speech, 17:22-31

4.5 The Epilogue, 17:32-34

4.6 Conclusions

²⁹⁵ The following exegesis is primarily based on a critical interaction with the following commentators: Bruce 1988; Bruce 1990a; Conzelmann 1987; Gempf 1994; Haenchen 1977; Krodel 1986; Larsson 1987; Longenecker 1981; Lövestam 1988; Marshall 1980; Pesch 1986; Roloff 1981; Schneider, G. 1982; Weiser 1985; and Witherington 1998. Important treatments are also Carson 1996b; Gempf 1988; Gempf 1993a; Gempf 1993b; Given 1995; Gooding 1990; Gärtner 1955; Kjær-Hansen 1996; Prior, K. 1995; Stonehouse 1949; Stott 1990; Winter 1991; Winter 1996; and Yeo 1994. Some older Scandinavian contributions have also been consulted: Danbolt 1948; Falk-Rønne 1979; Frøvig 1944; Fougner 1976; Mosbech 1945; and Odland 1936.

4.1 Introducing the Chapter

Building on the critical engagement with the commentators in chapter 3, this chapter presents an exegetical study of Acts 17:16-34 based specifically on the Greek text. The first part of the study deals briefly with *preliminary questions* related to context, text and structure. The subsequent verse-by-verse exposition has a dual emphasis. In the *textual* sections, the stress is on the analysis of crucial elements of the text and their specific meaning. In the *critical* sections, the overall meaning and theological significance of each verse and the key elements explored in the textual section will be drawn out. This dual exegetical discussion leads – together with the preceding discussion in chapters 2 and 3 – to some *conclusions* on Luke's apologetic intentions (as the narrator) and Paul's apologetic thinking and practice (as the orator).²⁹⁶

4.2 Context, Text and Structure

4.2.1 Context in Acts²⁹⁷

The *wider context* for Paul's visit to Athens is 15:39-18.22. The apostle Paul visited the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia (i.e. Greece) for the first time on his so-called "Second Missionary Journey" (c. A.D. 48-50).²⁹⁸ In this part of Acts, the emphasis is on

²⁹⁶ Thus, answers may be given at the end of this chapter to the two sub-questions identified in 1.5.1.

²⁹⁷ See also chapter 2.

²⁹⁸ For the chronology, see e.g. Alexander 1993:122-123.

Christianity and the pagan world, and Paul's visit to Athens clearly plays a key role in this section of Luke's narrative.²⁹⁹

The *immediate context* for Paul's visit in Athens is 17:10-18:18.

- a) Paul at Berea (17:10-13), where the emphasis on the synagogue ministry and the Bereans' "examination of the Scriptures" forms a clear contrast to 17:16-34.
- b) The transitional verses of 17:14-15 depict Paul in travel from Berea to Athens. The apostle had to leave Berea in a state of emergency because of strong opposition, and was brought by friends to Athens (17:15). His travel companions Silas and Timothy, however, stayed behind in Berea (17:14). They were soon to join him in Corinth (17:15; 18:1,5; cf. 1 Thess. 3:1-6).³⁰⁰
- c) Paul at Athens (17:16-34).
- d) In a new transitional verse Luke records Paul's travels from Athens to Corinth (18:1).³⁰¹
- e) Paul at Corinth 18: 2ff, where the emphasis is on Paul's ministry in the synagogue (18:4-7a³⁰²; as a contrast to the non-Jewish emphasis in Athens) and in a private house (18:7b-11;

²⁹⁹ As expressed by Gooding: "The only speech from this period that Luke summarises at any length is Paul's address to the Court of the Areopagus at Athens. Some, if not all, of the members of the court were intellectually sophisticated, but all of them, naturally enough, were pagans. In explaining to the court the essential features of Christianity, Paul inevitably does so against the background not of Judaism but of pagan religious, philosophical and political thought and practice. And Luke provides us with a comparatively full outline of this address because it is typical of the special emphasis he wishes this section of Acts to carry." (Gooding 1990:247-248)

³⁰⁰ A responsible harmonization of Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; and 1 Thess. 3:1-6 might lead to a more complicated reconstruction of the events. In that case it is possible that "Bruce, Marshall and Polhill are right that Timothy and Silas did rejoin Paul in Athens briefly, from which point, after hearing their reports, Paul sent them to Thessalonica and Philippi respectively, after which they met Paul again in Corinth" (Witherington 1998:510).

³⁰¹ See further on the relationship between Acts 17-18 and 1 Cor. 2:1ff in 3.3.3.2.

³⁰² Luke's emphasis on reasoning, persuasion and witness in Paul's ministry in Corinth (as in

as a contrast to the marketplace in Athens). Before leaving Corinth (18:18b), Paul is vindicated by Roman law (18:12-18a).

4.2.2 Text-critical remarks

The text of this passage seems largely well established by the text critics. The most disputed case is in 17:26 where the Western text adds αἵματος after ἐνὸς. Most commentators seem to claim that the shorter Alexandrian text should be preferred as the more difficult (i.e. the more ambiguous) reading and as supported by what seems to be the best external evidence.³⁰³ The following exegetical discussion is based on the widely agreed text of 17:16-34 as found in UBS.

4.2.3 Narrative structure

The passage falls naturally into three main narrative parts:³⁰⁴ The first part in vv. 16-21 consists of the Lucan introduction, the next part in vv. 22-31 is the Lucan summary of the Areopagus Speech, and the final part in vv. 32-34 is the Lucan epilogue. This structure is used as the general outline of the exegetical study in this chapter. More detailed outlines are given under each of the three major sections.

Athens) should be noticed.

³⁰³ See the discussions in Metzger (p. 456) and in Witherington 1998:526. For a discussion of other less disputed cases of different textual variants in this passage, see Metzger (pp. 455-460).

³⁰⁴ Weiser's judgment is representative of what seems to be the unanimous opinion among the commentators: "Die Szene zeigt einen sehr klaren Aufbau. Die VV 16-21 bilden die *Einleitung*, die VV 22-31 den *Hauptteil*: die Rede des Paulus in Form einer *Missionspredigt* vor gebildeten Heiden und die VV 32-34 den *Abschluss*: die Wirkung der Rede." (Weiser 1985:455) It is a matter

4.3 The Introduction, 17:16-21

Outline:

17:16 Paul waiting in Athens: Distressed by idols.

17:17 Paul's dialogues in the synagogue and in the marketplace.

17:18 Initial reactions of Athenian philosophers to Paul's message.

17:19-20 Paul brought to the Areopagus to present his teaching.

17:21 Luke's explanatory comment about the Athenians.

4.3.1 Paul waiting in Athens: Distressed by idols, 17:16

17.16 Ἐν δὲ ταῖς Ἀθήναις ἐκδεχομένου αὐτοῦ τοῦ Παύλου παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ θεωροῦντος κατείδωλον οὔσαν τὴν πόλιν.

Textual comments:

1. Ἐν δὲ ταῖς Ἀθήναις

"Athen, damals eine stille Kleinstadt mit etwa 5000 Bürgern, lebte von seiner grossen

Vergangenheit."³⁰⁵ The Greek city-state Athens (Ἀθῆναι) had been a crucial political,

of debate, though, whether the expressions 'missionary speech' or 'sermon' are appropriate categories (see 3.5.2).

³⁰⁵ Haenchen 1977:496. Witherington suggests accordingly, that the size of Athens at this time was "down to perhaps as few as five thousand to ten thousand voting citizens" (Witherington 1998:513). The city could thus be described as "a provincial backwater, a small university town of about twenty-five thousand people, more concerned with ideas than commerce and living in the memories of its glorious history" (McRay 2000:139). On Athens, see also Gill, D.W. 1994a.

economical and cultural centre in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. After the Romans had conquered Greece (in 146 B.C.), Athens became a *civitas libera et foederata* (i.e. a free and allied city within the Empire, linked to Rome by treaty).³⁰⁶ It was independent of the governor of Achaia, paid no taxes to Rome and enjoyed internal judicial autonomy.³⁰⁷ At the time of the apostle Paul – in spite of its political decline - Athens still seems to have been one of the major cultural and intellectual centres in the Roman Empire.³⁰⁸ This could be seen primarily in its function as a leading centre of learning, but also in terms of the many major buildings and monuments of great art still being present there. Athens also remained "the symbol of the great philosophers in popular opinion"³⁰⁹. The intellectual, moral and religious atmosphere of the city at this time has been described as "mildly promiscuous... [and representative of] a culture in moderate decline"³¹⁰.

2. ἐκδεχομένου αὐτοῦ τοῦ Παύλου

Paul spent some time in Athens waiting (ἐκδέχομαι means to 'wait (for)', 'expect') for his travel companions and fellow missionaries Silas and Timothy (see 4.2.1).

3. παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ

³⁰⁶ Jeffers comments: "In view of its prominent past, the Romans recognized Athens as a free and allied city and allowed it to continue its institutions and self-governance." (Jeffers 1999: 261)

³⁰⁷ Jeffers observes that a federate city like Athens "paid no tribute to Rome and was independent of the provincial government of its province" (Jeffers 1999:117).

³⁰⁸ Athens came to be "regarded as something like the cultural capital of the Hellenistic world, the heart of everything that was Greek" (Wallace & Williams 1998:210).

³⁰⁹ Keener 1993:372.

³¹⁰ Charles 1995:51.

The use of the emphatic word παρωξύνω (means to 'spur', 'stir to anger'; cf. 1 Cor. 13:5 and the cognate noun in Acts 15:39) indicates that Paul's spirit (πνεῦμα) was strongly aroused or provoked within him (by anger, grief and/or a desire to convert them). "The imperfect tense indicates that this was not restricted to the initial shock of what he saw, but it remained with him."³¹¹ This verb (παρωξύνομαι) is used in the LXX of God's reaction to idolatry, cf. Dt. 9:7,18, 22; Ps. 106:28-29; Hos. 8:5; Is. 65:2-3. (Cf. the striking contrast between Paul's reaction in this verse and Paul's *exordium* in vv. 22-23; see also 3.4.3.1.)

4. θεωροῦντος κατείδωλον οὔσαν τὴν πόλιν

Paul was observing (θεωρέω means to 'see', 'look at', 'observe') the city of Athens and was obviously struck by all the religious objects of worship (cf. vv. 22-23). κατείδωλος occurs only here in the NT and has not been found elsewhere in the Greek literature. It denotes probably "a veritable forest of idols" (see 3.4.3.1), thereby conveying an eyewitness impression (cf. θεωροῦντος) that the city (τὴν πόλιν) itself was full of idols.³¹² The whole Greek pantheon was seemingly represented in ancient Athens. "The abundance of images at Athens is abundantly attested [to] in literature and in the remains."³¹³ κατείδωλος should probably be understood both as a general description of Athenian religious images and as a specific reference to the vast number of Hermes' images

³¹¹ Prior, K. 1995:41.

³¹² Wycherley 1968:619. He points out that κατα compounds often refer to luxuriated vegetation or growth (literally or figuratively).

³¹³ Hemer 1989a:116.

present all over the city (and esp. to those at the entrance to the *agora*). Stonehouse points out, however, that "the special circumstances in Athens merely provided the occasion for Paul's deep indignation; his fervent monotheism was the actual cause of it"³¹⁴.

Critical comments:

This introductory verse sets the scene for the Athenian incident, which took place while Paul was waiting for his travel companions in Athens (v. 16a). No missionary outreach to this city seems to have been planned in advance (see 3.5.2.2).

The emphasis in Luke's introductory remark is clearly on what Paul actually saw (κατείδωλον) and felt (παρωξύνω) as a Christian, when encountering the beauty and brilliance of Athens (v. 16b). "The aesthetic point of view which characterized classical culture is absent. The Jewish-Christian rejection of 'idols' dominates."³¹⁵

The focus of this verse is negatively on Paul's abhorrence of idolatry and positively on his zeal and jealousy for the Name of God. Paul's deep distress was caused by his consistent monotheism and is paralleled in 1 Cor. 8:4ff; 10:14,19f; Rom. 1:23,25; and 1 Thess. 1:9. What Paul saw in Athens moved him, not only to anger but to action (vv. 17ff). This transitional verse, then, gives a glimpse of the depth and power of Paul's motivation and zeal as a Christian evangelist and apologist.

³¹⁴ Stonehouse 1949:11.

³¹⁵ Conzelmann 1987:138.

4.3.2 Paul's dialogues in the synagogue and the marketplace, 17:17

17.17 διελέγετο μὲν οὖν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις καὶ τοῖς
σεβομένοις καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ κατὰ πᾶσαν ἡμέραν πρὸς τοὺς
αρατυγχάνοντας. π

Textual comments:

1. διελέγετο

διαλέγομαι means either to 'discuss/conduct a discussion' (17:2) or simply to 'speak, preach' (possibly 18:4,19), and is here used both for the synagogue ministry and the *agora* ministry (see also 2.2.2). The use of this word in the context of Athens possibly indicates a Lucan description of Paul using the Socratic method of teaching by means of dialogue (19:9; see 3.4.4.4). The emphasis (as in 17:2-4) is on logic, rhetoric and persuasion and seems to imply that Paul dealt carefully with the listeners' questions.

2. μὲν οὖν

This expression ('so', 'therefore') connects v. 17 to v. 16, thereby indicating that Paul's distress or anger is the cause for his actions in v. 17ff. Longenecker suggests that μὲν οὖν marks a new division in the narrative by "tying together Luke's introduction (v. 16) with his source material (v. 17ff)".³¹⁶

3. ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ

Luke briefly describes Paul's visit to the συναγωγή in Athens. At the time of Paul, in the 1st century A.D., synagogues existed wherever Jews lived.³¹⁷ "References to the synagogue at Athens is illustrated by the occurrence of Jewish inscriptions there (*CIJ* 712-15)."³¹⁸ A Pauline synagogue ministry in Athens is both consistent with Paul's usual custom (17:2; see also 9:20; 13:5,14,46; 14:1; 16:13; 17:10; 18:4,19; 19:8; 28:17) and in accord with Paul's explicit obligations and strategy in e.g. Rom. 1:16 and 1 Cor. 9:19ff.³¹⁹

4. τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις καὶ τοῖς σεβομένοις

The community of the synagogue is here specified as consisting of Jews (τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις) and 'God-fearers' (τοῖς σεβομένοις). The latter seems to be a technical term (cf. 10:2,22,35; 13:16,26,43,50; 16:14; 17:4,17; 18:7), which - in a Jewish context - describes "pagans who accepted the ethical monotheism of Judaism and attended the synagogue, but who did not obligate themselves to keep the whole Jewish law"³²⁰. The emphasis here is on the Jewish background and character of the synagogue setting as a contrast to what follows.

5. καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ

The Lucan transition to Paul's Gentile ministry in Athens is smooth and swift. The apostle

³¹⁶ Longenecker 1981:473.

³¹⁷ See also Jeffers 1999:216-217.

³¹⁸ Hemer 1989a:116.

³¹⁹ *Contra* e.g. Conzelmann 1987:138; see also 3.3.3.3.

³²⁰ BAGD σεβομαι 2a. See also Hemer 1989a:444-447 and Hvalvik 1994:140-156.

Levinskaya notes that "it seems more in accordance with the historical setting of the first century and with Luke's usage if σεβομένοι has the same meaning as the full formula" (Levinskaya

went to the *agora* (cf. 16:19), which had a crucial function in Athens both as a market place and as a centre of public life (cf. 3.4.1.1). The apostle reasoned or argued in the *agora*. This description of philosophical debate in the *agora* was characteristic of Athenian life and may be reminiscent of Socrates (as noted in 3.4.4.4).

6. κατὰ πᾶσαν ἡμέραν

Paul seems to have frequented the *agora* every day (κατὰ πᾶσαν ἡμέραν) during his visit in Athens. This public and frequent ministry is paralleled in e.g. Ephesus (19:9-10).

7. πρὸς τοὺς παρατυγχάνοντας

Both Plato and Luke use the word παρατυγχάνω ('happen to be near/present') to describe the "casual passers-by" (NEB), with whom Socrates and Paul interacted respectively in the *agora*.³²¹ The implicit emphasis in Luke's narrative is on the Gentile background of those Paul met in the *agora* setting.

Critical comments:

This verse introduces Paul's evangelistic and apologetic ministry in Athens, both in terms of methods and settings. Paul's emotional and spiritual distress (v. 16) resulted in a missionary activity directed towards the synagogue (v. 17a) and the *agora* (v. 17bf).

1996:124).

³²¹ Cf. Sandnes 1993:21.

Luke briefly mentions Paul's ministry in the synagogue (possibly on the Sabbath), but gives no information about the content or the results. It is reasonable to assume, however, that Paul's message in the Athenian synagogue resembled his approach in other synagogues (e.g. 13:1ff and 17:2-4; see also 2.2.4). The emphasis in Luke's narrative is clearly not on Paul's synagogue ministry in Athens, but on his daily public discussions in the *agora* with those who happened to be there (vv. 17b-18). Schneider points out that "die Erzählung will an die sokratische Anknüpfungsmethode erinnern".³²² This would imply that Paul here probably is described by Luke as a 'Christian Socrates', both in terms of the scene (*agora*) and the rhetorical strategy (dialogue).

This verse describes Paul's move from the Jewish context of the synagogue to the non-Jewish context of the *agora*. Luke's narrative is not explicit at this point, but it seems that this Pauline move is a result not of Jewish rejection but of a deliberative strategy. In order to communicate with the pagan Athenians, the apostle entered the public scene of the *agora* and argued for the truth of the Gospel. Luke's intention (as indicated in 2.3.3) seems to be to give his readers an extensive example of Paul's evangelistic and apologetic approach, when encountering pagan philosophy and religion in public.

4.3.3 Initial reaction of Athenian philosophers to Paul's message, 17:18

17.18 τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στοϊκῶν φιλοσόφων συνέβαλλον αὐτῷ, καὶ τινες ἔλεγον, Τί ἂν θέλοι ὁ σπερμολόγος οὗτος λέγειν; οἱ δέ.

³²² Schneider, G. 1982:236. See the discussion in 3.4.4.4.

Ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι, ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο.

Textual comments:

1. τινὲς δὲ καὶ ... φιλοσόφων συνέβαλλον αὐτῷ

Some (τινὲς) philosophers (φιλόσοφος, *hapax legomena* in NT) responded to Paul by συνέβαλλον (συμβάλλω means 'to converse' or 'to engage in argument'; cf. 4:15 and 2.2.2). The juxtaposition of the two schools in Luke's narrative should not be seen as a literary invention (in order "to create a milieu"³²³) but as Luke's faithfulness to the original historical situation (cf. 3.6.1).

2. τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στοϊκῶν

Grammatically, "only one article governs both nouns in expressions like 'the Epicureans and Stoics'.³²⁴ Paul met with representatives of these two rival and influential Hellenistic philosophical schools.³²⁵

3. καὶ τινες ἔλεγον ... οἱ δὲ

This juxtaposition introduces two significant comments from the philosophers.³²⁶ The

³²³ Conzelmann 1987:134.

³²⁴ Carson 1996a:82.

³²⁵ See 3.4.4.1 for a summary of Epicureanism and Stoicism; cf. also Frøvig 1938.

³²⁶ The attitudes referred to in 17:18ff should probably not be taken as referring to a division between Epicureans (mocking) and Stoics (confused but interested) in their evaluation of Paul, as claimed by e.g. Hansen 1998:310-311. See the discussion in 3.4.4 and the comments to 17:32 in 4.5.1.

interpretation of the meaning and significance of these comments influences the understanding of the whole passage. When referring to the philosophers' comment, Luke uses a cultured - or classical - style.

4. ... Τί ἂν θέλοι ὁ σπερμολόγος οὗτος λέγειν

The use of potential optative (Τί ἂν θέλοι; BDF § 385.1) introduces the description of Paul as a σπερμολόγος, a colourful word of Athenian slang meaning 'a seed-picker'. It was used of birds (esp. the rook) picking up seeds, as well as non-literally of the idler or worthless loafer in the market place (cf. also the similar meaning of ἀγοραῖος in 17:5). The meaning here is "a retailer of secondhand scraps of philosophy"³²⁷. This arrogant and derogatory comment indicates that Paul by some philosophers was considered as a 'babbler', 'charlatan' or 'dilettante', i.e. someone not to be taken seriously intellectually.

5. ... Ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι

Paul is also described as a preacher (καταγγελεὺς meaning 'announcer, herald'³²⁸) of foreign divinities (Ξένων δαιμονίων; the latter word is here used in its neutral, Greek sense). Some philosophers thus saw Paul as a propagandist for obscure, oriental gods.

³²⁷ Bruce 1988:331.

³²⁸ Winter observes: "The term καταγγελεὺς was used in the time of Augustus of 'a herald' of the imperial cult, and also of the herald of the Areopagus who appeared on the archon-list and possessed the seal of Athens. This would suggest that Paul was seen by his hearers to be announcing new deities to the Athenians." (Winter 1996:80)

Garland comments on the convenience of the *agora* (cf. v. 17; see also 3.4.1.1) when introducing new gods to Athens:

"A convenient forum in which to advertise the benefits of a new god and hence to drum up popular support would have been a public meeting place such as the Agora, the civic, administrative and commercial heart of the city and a popular venue for all those who wished to exchange ideas."³²⁹

The actual wording of this Athenian comment on foreign gods undoubtedly reflects the Socratic tradition.³³⁰ In Luke's narrative, however, it is not meant as a formal judicial charge but as a technical term for a new religious message in the Athenian setting (as shown in 3.4.2.3). Due to possible religious and commercial consequences, such a message had to be investigated by the Athenian authorities.

6. ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο

The use of the word εὐαγγελίζομαι (meaning to 'proclaim/preach good news') indicates a proclamation of the Christian gospel, here summarized as 'Jesus and the Resurrection' (τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν). This Lucan expression is a key summary of the apostolic *kerygma* (as defined in footnote 42), and Kirk explains what was implicit in this pregnant formula in this setting:

³²⁹ Garland 1992:18-19.

³³⁰ Sandnes 1994:21 refers to Plato *Euthphr.* 1C, 2B, 3B; *Apol.* 24B-C; and Xenophon *Mem.* 1.1.1. This expression is the only undisputed reference to the Socratic tradition in Acts 17:16-34 (see also 3.4.4.4).

"a) Historical events are crucial to a right understanding of God. b) The only image of God which is allowed is that of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who perfectly represents Him (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). c) Death is not *survived* by a mysterious human essence called the soul. Rather it is *conquered*, so that a complete physical transformation may take place. In this way Paul raised physical existence to a position of crucial importance, over against the Greek denial. By implication he rejected any use made of religion to favour the spiritual over the material or the sacred over the secular."³³¹

This Pauline Gospel of 'Jesus and the Resurrection', however, seems to have been misunderstood as a new, foreign divine couple ('Jesus and Anastasis'): the 'Healer' (cf. ἰασις /ἰασο) and his wife 'Restoration' (cf. ἀναστατερία).³³² This Athenian misunderstanding of the concept of the Resurrection must be seen as a natural consequence of the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul. Paul returns to the topic of resurrection towards the end of his speech (cf. v. 31).

Critical comments:

Luke moves from a general description of the daily discussions in the *agora* (v. 17) to a specific focus on the reactions of some philosophers. This verse, then, introduces some crucial apologetic challenges that Paul encountered in Athens, where he had to justify the truth claims of the Christian faith over against specific questions, objections, and alternatives.

³³¹ Kirk 1992:148.

³³² According to Bruce 1990a:377, this plausible interpretation was suggested in Chase 1902:205-206. Regardless of how the misunderstanding is explained, however, it seems to be "difficult to escape the implications of the reference to foreign 'gods' followed by ὅτι" (Winter 1996:81 *contra* McKay 1994:411-412).

The contemporary and rival philosophical schools of Epicureanism and Stoicism were major alternatives to the Christian faith in the Hellenistic setting. Their teaching could be summarized as the Epicurean emphasis on 'chance, escape and the enjoyment of pleasure' *contra* the Stoic emphasis on 'fatalism, submission and the endurance of pain'.³³³ It seems reasonable to assume that Paul's dialogue with them would focus on questions of natural theology as well as on the specific truth claims of the Gospel.

Luke, using classical Greek, mentions two of the philosophers' comments. In the first comment, the apostle is accused of being ridiculous (a σπερμολόγος). This objection to the apostle and his message indicates that Paul encountered an audience, which was (at least partly) critical. The second comment describes Paul as a herald or advocate of foreign gods. This misunderstanding naturally leads to the new challenging setting in vv. 19-33 and the questions in vv. 19-20. The comments about 'foolish' and 'foreign' illustrate how a mixture of criticism and curiosity characterized the audience in Athens.

Luke adds an explanatory comment at the end of v. 18, thereby providing the readers, negatively with the background for the second comment, and positively with a brief summary of Paul's initial presentation in the *agora* as described in v. 17b. As in Lystra (14: 8-20), Luke "only repeats the follow-up talk intended to clarify misunderstandings"³³⁴.

³³³ This is a simplified but accurate summary by Stott 1990:281. See also 3.4.4.1.

³³⁴ Gempf 1995:68; see also 3.5.2.2. This textual element may be an implicit and soft Lucan critique of Paul's initial communicative approach as not being context-sensitive enough. Such an interpretation would suggest that Paul had to rethink his approach in Athens. For a further

4.3.4 Paul brought to the Areopagus to present his teaching, 17:19-20

17.19 ἐπιλαβόμενοι τε αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον Πάγον ἤγαγον λέγοντες,
Δυνάμεθα γινῶναι τίς ἡ καινὴ αὕτη ἡ ὑπὸ σοῦ λαλουμένη διδαχὴ;

Textual comments:

1. ἐπιλαβόμενοι τε αὐτοῦ

The word 'ἐπιλαμβάνομαι' ('take hold of, grasp, catch, sometimes with violence') either describes the arrest of Paul (cf. 21:33) or the act of accompanying him (peacefully) to the Ἄρειος Πάγος. Witherington prefers the rendering 'to take by force' in his recent commentary. He claims that "both the immediate narrative context with its allusion to Socrates and then the reference to the Areopagus, and the usage of the verb in the immediately surrounding chapters where Paul is regularly being hauled before officials to answer charges"³³⁵ suggest such a rendering. The latter friendly sense of 'accompanying' seems more reasonable, however, in view of a) the discussions in chapter 3 on the occasion (see 3.4.2) and possible Socratic allusions (see 3.4.4.4) and b) the overall interpretation of 17:18-20 (in 4.3.3-4).

2. ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον Πάγον ἤγαγον λέγοντες

Paul was brought to (ἐπὶ; here with the accusative: 'of place' (BAGD III.1), either 'on' or

‘before’³³⁶) the Ἄρειος Πάγος (literally ‘the Hill of Ares’, the Greek god of war). As shown in 3.4.1 and 3.4.2, this either refers to a) the hill of Ares or to b) the court or Council of the Areopagus (which at this time probably had its meetings in the *Stoa Basileios*).

It seems plausible to interpret this expression as a description of the Areopagus Council for the following reasons:

- a) A number of elements in the wider textual context seem to point in this direction (see 3.4.2.1), esp. the expressions ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου Πάγου (v. 22) and ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶ (v. 33), and the reference to Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης (v. 34). The textual comments in vv. 22, 33 and 34 will validate this premise.
- b) As indicated in 3.4.2, the Areopagus Speech (vv. 22 - 31) does not look like a formal, legal defence, and Luke does not give any hint of any formal, legal proceedings in the narrative framework. It seems therefore highly improbable that the Areopagus setting described in Acts 17:19-33 was a formal adversarial setting in court. As shown by Winter (see 3.4.2.3), however, the Lucan narrative fits the picture given in recent research regarding the role and function of the Areopagus Council in relation to the official introduction of new gods in Athens.

³³⁵ Witherington 1998:515.

³³⁶ Knowling argues that ἐπι with accusative “would be the correct expression for taking any one before an official court... But it does not therefore follow that a regular trial was instituted ... since there is nothing in the context to indicate this. But the form of expression certainly does

c) The second Athenian comment in v. 18 (Ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι) indicates that Paul was brought before the Council as a herald of foreign divinities. It would then have been an appropriate task of the Council to investigate Paul's message.

3. Δυνάμεθα γνῶναι τίς ἡ καινὴ αὕτη ἡ ὑπὸ σοῦ λαλουμένη διδασχῇ;
 Δυνάμεθα is usually translated 'may we...?' but could also be translated 'we have power and authority'. In the latter case it is used as a synonym for ἔξεστιν. γνῶναι is normally translated 'to know' but could also be translated 'to form a judgement'.³³⁷ The usual translation, which is preferred here, indicates that there is a request for more information from Paul. The emphasis is on his teaching (διδασχῇ) as being καινῇ, which means 'new, fresh, unknown, strange, remarkable' (also with the connotation: 'the marvellous, unheard-of'). In Acts, διδασχῇ "is used for early Christian preaching ... and in the mind of Luke, denotes the testimony of the apostles to Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 1:21)"³³⁸.

Critical comments:

seem to indicate that Paul was taken not *to* the Hill of Mars...but *before* a court or council." (Knowling 1988:368)

³³⁷ The two latter alternative translations (i.e. 'we have power and authority' and 'to form a judgment') are suggested by Winter. He argues that this alternative rendering is plausible "when these words are read within the semantic fields of *politeia*. ... Good grounds exist, then, for arguing that, in this verse, Paul was not being asked to provide an explanation. Instead the Council was informing him initially 'we possess the legal right to judge what this new teaching is that is being spoken by you'." (Winter 1996:81-82) The first alternative translation ('we have power and authority') seems possible, whereas the second alternative rendering ('to form a judgment') seems less likely since the stem γινώσκειν - γνῶσις in the traditional meaning 'to know' - 'knowledge' plays a significant role in this passage (cf. v. 19, 20, 23, 30).

This verse marks the transition between the general *agora* scene (vv. 17b - 18) and the specific *agora* setting before the Areopagus (vv. 19-33). As argued in 3.4.1, this transition is probably not a change of location geographically, but nevertheless a significant change of contexts. Paul is thus leaving the general marketplace setting with its more informal discussions and entering the more formal setting of the Areopagus Council. The main intention of v. 19, then, is to introduce the Areopagus setting, which makes the interpretation of this disputed verse crucial for the understanding of the whole passage.

Paul was taken to the open meeting of the Areopagus Council, which was the appropriate Athenian body in the matter of new or foreign deities. The conventions surrounding a herald's official introduction of new deities into the Athenian Pantheon (see 3.4.2.3) thus throws light on Paul's speech. Paul clearly used this formal Athenian context for apologetic purposes.³³⁹

In v. 19 (and v. 20), Luke describes the Athenians' request for more information about Paul's message. The emphasis in the latter part of v. 19 seems to be on 'the new teaching', which refers to 'the foreign gods' in v. 18 and is the focus of vv. 20-21. The audience Paul was facing in this open meeting of the Areopagus Council could thus be characterized as both critical and curious (see also v. 18 and 3.5.1.4).

³³⁸ Wegenast 1986:769.

³³⁹ See e.g. Sandnes 1993:15; Bruce 1977:47-48; and Bruce 1990a:379.

17.20 ξενίζοντα γάρ τινα εἰσφέρεις εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς ἡμῶν· βουλόμεθα οὖν γινῶναι τίνα θέλει ταῦτα εἶναι.

Textual comments:

1. ξενίζοντα γάρ τινα

The conjunction γάρ is used to express cause or continuation. It ties v. 20 to the previous verse, thus explaining the reason for the assessment of Paul by the Council.

ξενίζοντα τινα ('surprising things'; ξενίζω means 'to surprise or astonish with something new or strange', BAGD) refers to Ξένων δαιμονίων in v. 18. Winter comments that the neuter construction "would indicate the caution with which the content of Paul's proclamation is treated, for they would not concede that these 'things' were deities before examination"³⁴⁰.

2. εἰσφέρεις εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς ἡμῶν

εἰσφέρω (meaning to 'bring in', 'carry in', 'lead in') is often used in the Socratic tradition to describe the introduction of foreign (or other) gods.³⁴¹ Paul introduces a message (about 'foreign gods') that is strange 'to our ears' (εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς ἡμῶν; ἀκοή here means 'the ear', cf. Mk. 7:35).

³⁴⁰ Winter 1996:82.

³⁴¹ Sandnes 1993:21-22 refers to Xenophon *Apol.* 10-11, as well as to Justin *I Apol.* 5.4 and 2 *Apol.* 10.5. Unlike Socrates, Paul was not on a formal trial in Athens. This allusion to the Socratic

3. βουλόμεθα οὖν γινῶναι τίνα θέλει ταῦτα εἶναι.

This phrase is usually translated 'we would (βουλόμεθα) know (γινῶναι) therefore (οὖν) what these things mean (τίνα θέλει ταῦτα εἶναι; cf. 2:12)'.³⁴² A neuter word (ταῦτα) again underlines the caution of the Athenians (cf. v. 20a). The use of γινῶναι seems to be significant (cf. vv. 19, 23, 30), and indicates (when understood in its traditional meaning) what is at issue at the most basic level, i.e. "not a legal problem, but an epistemological one"³⁴³.

Critical comments:

Verses 19 and 20 provide the background to why Paul was brought to the Areopagus Council. The Athenians were confused by his teaching (v. 20a) and wanted to know more about it (v. 20b). "'May we know' occurs in v. 19, the wish is given a reason and explained in v. 20a, and then is repeated with a variation in vocabulary, in v. 20b."³⁴⁴ This verse (v. 20) has a dual emphasis, in v. 20a on the strangeness of Paul's message and in v. 20b on the curiosity of the Athenians.

tradition, however, indirectly underlines the critical attitudes in the audience.

³⁴² Winter suggests another possible translation (on the basis of alternative translations of γινῶναι, cf. v. 19, as well as of θέλω, which is "best rendered 'maintain', 'hold' or 'claim' when it is followed by the accusative and the infinitive, as in Acts 17:20b."): 'We therefore wish to make a judgement (γινῶναι) on what it is being claimed (or decreed) these things are.' (See Winter 1996:82-83.)

³⁴³ Conzelmann 1987:140.

³⁴⁴ Conzelmann 1987:140.

The "strange" message of Paul was his gospel of τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν (v. 18). These two crucial aspects of Paul's message resulted both in criticism (v. 18) and curiosity (vv. 19-20) among the Athenians. Jesus was a foreign Hebrew name of a concrete, historical person (an unknown Jew), whose death in Palestine on a Roman cross was said to bring salvation for everyone. Therefore the focus in the Christian gospel was not on a mythological figure – but on recent historical events. The Resurrection was an entirely new concept to the Athenians; not the mysterious survival (or the immortality) of the soul, but the complete physical transformation of the body. The Christian message – of the past Resurrection of Jesus resulting in the future Resurrection of his followers – was therefore a gospel of life and hope.³⁴⁵

This verse, which often seems to be neglected by the commentators, is crucial in Luke's introduction to the Areopagus Speech. The Athenians openly acknowledge their ignorance about the Christian gospel. By emphasizing the strangeness (or the foreign nature) of the gospel (v. 20a), Luke here seems implicitly to indicate the limitations of natural revelation. The Christian gospel brings a message, which is completely new (cf. vv. 18f, 30f). This emphasis on the "strangeness" of the gospel functions in Luke's narrative as a realistic backdrop to Paul's apologetic endeavour in Athens.

In order to overcome this situation, Paul uses the ignorance (v. 20a) and curiosity (v. 20b) of the Athenians as legitimate and crucial points of contact. *This dual theme of*

³⁴⁵ Some of these observations are taken from Kirk 1992:148-149. See further 4.4.3-4.5.1.

ignorance and curiosity holds a key to an understanding of Paul's apologetic strategy in Athens. Their ignorance provided him with a theological starting-point (cf. v. 23f), whereas their curiosity gave him a rhetorical starting-point (cf. vv. 19-22).³⁴⁶

4.3.5 Luke's explanatory comment about the Athenians, 17:21

17.21 Ἰ Αθηναῖοι δὲ πάντες καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες ξένοι εἰς οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ καίρου ἢ λέγειν τι ἢ ἀκούειν τι καινότερον.

Textual comments:

1. Ἰ Αθηναῖοι δὲ πάντες καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες ξένοι

Luke's comment describes both the resident Athenians and the foreign visitors.

ἐπιδημέω means to 'stay in a place as a stranger or visitor' or to 'be in town'. The

expression ἐπιδημοῦντες ξένοι describes "the μετοικοι ('resident aliens'), as they were called in Athenian law"³⁴⁷

2. εἰς οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ καίρου

The use of the word εὐκαιρέω ('have a favourable time, leisure, opportunity', to 'spend time') implies that the Athenians "used to spend their time in nothing else than...".

³⁴⁶ See further 5.2.

³⁴⁷ Bruce 1990a:378. It should be noticed that in the *polis* "for which we have the fullest information, Athens, full citizenship was mainly confined to the children of marriages between

3. ἡ λέγειν τι ἢ ἀκούειν τι καινότερον

The Greek comparative degree (καινότερον, from καινός) here ought to be translated by the English positive degree ("latest new"):³⁴⁸ "telling and hearing the latest news" (cf. v. 19 on Paul's καινή διδασχά). As Hemer points out, this comment on the Athenian character is true to the ancient literature, but was probably common knowledge.³⁴⁹ Luke seems to use these words about the Athenians with an ironic emphasis, thus implicitly referring to σπερμολόγος in v. 18: "It is [in fact] they who were 'collectors of scraps'."³⁵⁰

Critical comments:

The focus of this verse is on the attitude of Athenians in general. The interest in novelties (as such) seems to have been part of the general Athenian intellectual atmosphere, and therefore characterizing residents and visitors alike.

In this concluding introductory remark, Luke affirms that Paul faced an audience characterized by curiosity. Apart from being an important clue to the meaning of the speech (regarding the rhetorical starting-point), the tone in this verse seems to be rather

citizens, and naturalization of foreigners was rare. Athens attracted numerous alien residents (*metoikoi*) who had legal but not political rights" (Wallace & Williams 1998:95-96).

³⁴⁸ BDF § 244.2.

³⁴⁹ Hemer 1989a:117. As Haenchen remarks: "Die Neugier der Athener war sprichwörtlich" (Haenchen 1977:499). Key references to similar criticisms of the proverbial curiosity of the Athenians are found in Longenecker 1981:474; Conzelmann 1987:140; and Witherington 1998:517. It has been pointed out that at this time "Athenian desire for entertainment also extended to gladiatorial shows, drawing the criticism of several famous moralists" (Keener 1993:373).

³⁵⁰ Gempf 1994:1093.

sarcastic and ironic. The Athenians are here characterized as "seekers after the new rather than the true; seekers after the curious rather than the κύριος".³⁵¹ This verse is a narrative aside, and provides thus Luke's readers with some crucial clues. The comment about the Athenians serves as a striking contrast to the attitude of the Bereans (17:11), but even more as an important clue to the negative reactions recorded in vv. 18 and 32a.

"For as much as they liked to hear 'new' gossiping things, a truly new approach to and from God which would undercut the status quo of popular religion and philosophical sophistication would be threatening indeed."³⁵²

As observed in 3.4.2.2, this verse clearly indicates that a judicial reading of this narrative as an adversarial trial is highly unlikely. The main motif behind the interrogation of Paul, then, seems to have been curiosity. However, as Winter points out (cf. 3.4.2.3), this understanding "by no means excludes a gathering of the Areopagus fulfilling its role by assessing the claims of Paul"³⁵³.

4.4 The Areopagus Speech, 17: 22-31

Outline:

17:22-23 The setting and the *exordium*.

17:24-29 The *probatio*.

17:30-31 The *peroratio*.

³⁵¹ Witherington 1998:535.

³⁵² Krodel 1986:327.

³⁵³ Winter 1996:87.

4.4.1 The setting and the exordium, 17:22-23 – Introducing the topic(s)

17.22

Σταθείς δὲ [ὁ] Παῦλος ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου Πάγου ἔφη, ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, κατὰ πάντα ὥς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ.

Textual comments:

1. Σταθείς δὲ [ὁ] Παῦλος ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου Πάγου

Σταθείς is derived from ἵστημι, meaning 'step up or stand to say something or make a speech' (Lk. 18:11; Acts 2:14). Without the article ἐν μέσῳ means 'into the middle, before (someone)', and probably indicates the Council, not the hill (cf. 4:7; 17:19). Paul is here assuming "the common posture of an orator"³⁵⁴, and presents his speech before the Council as a response to the invitation in v. 19, possibly after a day's preparation (see 3.5.1.1).

2. ἔφη, ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι

ἔφη introduces direct discourse. Paul starts his speech by an opening call for attention.

This vocative address is similar to e.g. 13:16 and probably follows rhetorical conventions

in Athens.³⁵⁵ It should be noted, in contrast to 13:26, "that Paul does not use the word

[ἄδελφοί] when speaking to a Gentile audience".³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ Yeo 1994:84.

3. κατὰ πάντα ὥς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ

Paul refers here to something he saw or perceived (θεωρέω) in Athens, i.e. that the Athenians in everything (κατὰ πάντα) was δεισιδαιμονεστέρους. The adjective δεισιδαίμων³⁵⁷ either means 'religious' or 'superstitious', but often seems to be as vague as the English 'religious'. In this *exordium* it is best translated 'very or uncommonly religious'. While Paul seems to use this ambiguous word primarily as a *captatio benevolentiae*³⁵⁸, a gentle irony also seems to be implied. Conzelmann remarks that the piety of the Athenians "was as well known as their curiosity".³⁵⁹

Critical comments:

The description of the Areopagus setting in vv. 19 and 20 included an invitation to Paul to present his 'new teaching' on the 'foreign gods' of 'Jesus and resurrection' before the Areopagus Council. Following on from that, Luke now introduces the specific occasion (v. 22a) and a summary of the actual speech before the Council (vv. 22b-31). *The following exegetical discussion will demonstrate the appropriateness of Paul's speech, both rhetorically for this specific occasion and apologetically for this specific audience.*

³⁵⁵ See e.g. Witherington 1998:520.

³⁵⁶ Günther 1986:257.

³⁵⁷ It occurs only here, but the noun δεισιδαιμονία appears in 25:19. The adjective is a comparative form "compounded from *deido* (fear) and *daimon* (a deity or demon)" (Schneider, J. et al 1986:85)

³⁵⁸ See 3.4.3.1 and 3.5.1.3.

³⁵⁹ Conzelmann 1987:140.

Paul begins his *exordium* in a conventional way (v. 22b) by addressing the audience, followed by the *captatio benevolentiae*, where Paul, in seeking to secure initial audience goodwill, is commending the Athenians for being very religious. As Yeo notes:

"The use of "laudatory introduction" may not be exclusively positive or negative. It should be seen as a rhetorical technique whereby the "preacher" establishes rapport with the audience by means of a *captatio benevolentiae* (currying favor)".³⁶⁰

There is a marked contrast between what Paul felt (v. 16) and what he said (v. 22b; cf. also διαλεγομαι in v. 17 and the discussion in 3.4.3.1). This might be accounted for by exploring the crucial difference between Paul's listeners (the oratees) and Luke's readers (the narratees).³⁶¹

a) With regard to the original Athenian context, Paul is adopting a certain rhetorical and apologetic strategy. His aim is to catch the attention of the audience and at the same time to establish crucial points of contact.

b) At the same time, the ambiguity of the word δεισιδαίμων communicated to Luke's readers (and possibly also to some perceptive listeners) the actual irony of the situation described. Though being very religious, the Athenians were actually superstitious and ignorant about the true God.

17.23 διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὗρον καὶ β
ωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο, Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ. ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τ

³⁶⁰ Yeo 1994:85.

οὕτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

Textual comments:

1. διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν

The use of γὰρ καὶ indicates "the smooth transition from the *exordium* proper to the *narratio*".³⁶² Giving the reason (γὰρ) for the statement in v. 22b, Paul uses the verbs διέρχομαι ('go through' [Athens]) and ἀναθεωρέω ('look at again and again'; 'examine', 'observe carefully'). This verse (as well as v. 16) has "the typical motif of 'sightseeing', *periegesis*."³⁶³ σέβασμα is a neutral word for 'object of worship' or 'sanctuary' and would include both altars and images. The Athenians would understand this positively, but (at least) to Jewish readers a reference to 'idols' would be implied.³⁶⁴ The context clearly implies that Paul observes Athenian religion with a specific intention, i.e. in order to identify possible points of contact.

2. εὑρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο, Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ

Paul found (εὑρον) a specific altar (βωμός), with the inscription (ἐπιγράφω meaning 'write in or on') 'To an unknown god' (Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ). βωμός is the regular Greek word for altar. It occurs only here in the NT, because this is a pagan altar (but is often used with

³⁶¹ See e.g. Marshall 1980:285 and Given 1995. See also 1.5.1 and 3.5.1.

³⁶² Yeo 1994:85.

³⁶³ Moxnes 1995:120.

this meaning in LXX). The following is assumed about the altar ‘To an unknown god’ (on the basis of 3.3.2.2, 3.4.2.3 and 3.4.3.2): a) There are good reasons for supposing the historical authenticity of such an altar in Athens at this time; b) Paul uses the altar to establish significant (explicit or implicit) points of contact concerning admission of ignorance, critique of idolatry, and the desire to avoid divine judgment; c) The Council would not be taken by surprise by "the epigraphic citation but rather the affirmation that this was not a new divinity for the Athenians to recognize, for they had already erected an altar to him"³⁶⁵; d) It is also crucial to note that the reference to the altar seems to have a somewhat similar function in Paul's argument in this pagan context as an OT quotation in the synagogue context (see also v. 28).

3. Ο...τοῦτο

The use of neuter, not masculine, forms in describing the divine nature (cf. v. 29) seems to play on the pantheistic beliefs of many Athenians (maybe especially the Stoics).

4. ο οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε

ἀγνοοῦντες is catching up the word Ἀγνώστῳ of the altar inscription. Grammatically speaking, the emphasis here is on their ignorance (ἀγνοοῦντες), not on their worship (εὐσεβεῖτε). This is indicated both by the word order and "the fact that ἀγνοοῦντες is a participle, rather than an adverb being used, [which] means that the *worshippers* are being

³⁶⁴ Cf. Wis. 14:20 and 15:17, where σεβάσματα "is used pejoratively" (Gibson 2000:326).

described as ignorant"³⁶⁶. Given points out that here ἄγνοέω probably carries the double meaning of "a straightforward, non-culpable epistemic failure resulting in a lack of knowledge, or a culpable moral failure of acting ignorantly in regard to what is right, to act amiss"³⁶⁷.

5. τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν

An emphatic statement about what (τοῦτο) Paul (stress on ἐγὼ) intended to proclaim (καταγγέλλω, cf. v. 18: καταγγελεὺς) to the Athenians. καταγγέλλω is used frequently in Acts "of the official apostolic proclamation of the gospel"³⁶⁸, but did not as of itself carry such connotations to the original Athenian audience. It seems more appropriate – both in the light of the narrative framework and the speech – to describe the speech as an apologetic follow-up speech than as an evangelistic sermon *per se* (see also 3.5.2).³⁶⁹

Critical comments:

This verse, which is highly significant for the understanding of the whole speech³⁷⁰, is clearly linked to the previous verse. As a proof of his statement in v. 22b (about the religion of the Athenians), Paul now relates how he walked around in Athens – on ‘an

³⁶⁵ Winter 1996:84.

³⁶⁶ Gempf 1988:233. There is an interesting parallel to this in Jn. 4:22a; see the discussion in Haacker 1986:460-461.

³⁶⁷ Given 1995:366.

³⁶⁸ Stonehouse 1949:30.

³⁶⁹ Thus, to call the speech "a model of Christian evangelism (εὐηγγελιζετο) and proclamation (καταγγέλλω) in a Gentile context" (Hansen 1998:314) seems slightly inaccurate.

³⁷⁰ As Weiser points out, "der Interpretation des Verses 23 kommt für das Verständnis der

inspection tour' – carefully observing their σεβάσματα. Among all the religious objects of worship in Athens (cf. v. 16), Paul found an altar with the inscription Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ, which he chose as the starting-point in his speech due to the following reasons (see also 3.4.3.2):

- a) The ambiguity of the inscription made it possible both to find points of contact and at the same time to respond implicitly to the suggestion that he was preaching foreign gods (17:18). Through his reference to the altar, Paul is in fact arguing for 'the epistemic permission' of his claims about God.
- b) More precisely, Paul finds points of contact both in the Athenians' seemingly open acknowledgment of ignorance and in their desire to avoid divine wrath. Thus, common ground with the audience is established. This specific altar (claiming ignorance about God) implicitly functions as a devastating critique of all the other altars (claiming knowledge about the gods). This means that Luke (explicitly or implicitly) describes Paul as following the traditional philosophical critique – as exemplified by Socrates – of religion as idolatry.³⁷¹

After having used this altar as his starting-point, Paul states that he will proclaim to them what is worshipped as unknown. This proposition (*propositio* or *partitio*) is later to

ganzen Rede sowie ihrer theologischen und geistesgeschichtlichen Beurteilung eine Schlüsselstellung zu" (Weiser 1985:468).

³⁷¹ See esp. Skarsaune 1996 and Skarsaune 1998.

be demonstrated by Paul in vv. 24-29.³⁷² Paul makes a bold claim in v. 23b, i.e. to assume that his teaching really will bring new knowledge about the Unknown God. Implicit here is the belief that the Unknown God has revealed himself – and Paul as his authoritative herald. God is in fact known to Paul – and through Paul's message the Athenians can get to know Him. Thus, without such a communication, they would not really know the truth about God's nature and actions.

It is now possible to conclude with an outline of the structure and content of 17:22-23:

17:22a Setting

17:22b *Exordium* (1); Vocative address.

17:22c *Exordium* (2); The *captatio benevolentiae*: The religiosity of the Athenians.

17:23a *Exordium* (3); The *narratio*: Paul's tour of Athens and the altar.

17:23b *Exordium* (4); The *propositio*: Paul's aim is to make known the Unknown God.

4.4.2 The *probatio*, 17:24-29 – Setting forth key arguments

4.4.2.1 The *Probatio* I, 17:24-25 – On the nature of God

17.24 ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ

Textual comments:

³⁷² Satterthwaite 1993:360.

1. ὁ θεὸς

Paul starts his *probatio* by changing from a neuter (v. 23b) to a masculine form when describing the Divine Being. Thereby the apostle both affirms the existence of a personal God and identifies the Athenian ἄγνωστος θεὸς as this one, true God.

2. ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ

Here, Paul seems to express the teachings of crucial OT passages (cf. Ex. 20:11; Ps. 145 (MT 146):6; Is. 42:5; cf. also Acts 4:24) in a way that would be understandable to the Gentile audience. The use of the word κόσμος is significant (there is no equivalent Hebrew term, the OT equivalent is 'heaven and earth', cf. v. 24b), since this is a term used both in Greek-speaking Judaism (cf. Wis. 9:9; 11:17; 2 Macc. 7:23) and by Greek philosophers (Plato *Tim.* 28C; 76C; Epictetus 4,6,7).³⁷³ By using κόσμος (cf. Rom. 1:20), Paul communicates to the Athenians that the personal God is the Creator of the Universe.³⁷⁴

3. οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος

The demonstrative pronoun οὗτος is emphatic, meaning "this same creator God".³⁷⁵ Being the sovereign Creator, God is also the Lord (κύριος) of heaven and earth. (Cf. also Deut. 10:14; Is. 66:1-2.) The use of ὑπάρχω indicates a more formal style. The introduction of

³⁷³ For possible references and quotations from Hellenistic writers in this and the following verses; see 3.4.4.2.

³⁷⁴ See e.g. Larsson 1987:388.

God as κύριος is significant for Paul's argument later on in the speech (esp. as a premise for the emphasis on conversion and judgment in vv. 30-31). At this stage in the speech, however, it points to God's active Lordship in creation.³⁷⁶

4. οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ

A sovereign Creator and Lord does not dwell (κατοικέω meaning 'live, dwell, reside, settle (down)') in man-made (χειροποίητος, i.e. 'made by human hands (of buildings, specifically temples)') temples (ναός, generally of temples). This temple critique is reminiscent of 1 Kings 8:27, 2 Chron. 6:18 and Is. 66:1f (cf. also Is. 46:6; Mk. 14:58), and it corresponds to Acts 7:48 (in a Jewish setting)³⁷⁷ as well as to e.g. Jos. *Ant.* 8:227-29, *Sib. Or.* 4:8-11, and Plutarch *Mor.* 1034b. The Epicureans would have agreed with this critique, since they were "notionally opposed to all forms of superstition"³⁷⁸.

Critical comments:

Paul begins his *probatio* by introducing the sovereign and transcendent Creator and Lord of the universe. Bruce observes that as "at Lystra, Paul begins with the revelation of God in creation"³⁷⁹. Paul's language is that of a Greek-speaking Jew when speaking to pagans

³⁷⁵ Witherington 1998:525.

³⁷⁶ See e.g. Weiser 1985:470.

³⁷⁷ Hemer comments perceptively, that "Stephen's critique ... is reflected in words ascribed to Paul, on whom Stephen's words ostensibly made great impact" (Hemer 1989a:190). See also Weinert 1987:90.

³⁷⁸ Winter 1991:123.

³⁷⁹ Bruce 1990a:382.

about the creational monotheism of the OT. Consequently, there are many allusions to the OT (in this verse as well as in the following verses) but no explicit quotations. For Paul, "the unknown God among the gods is in fact the true and only One. He is the God of the OT and of salvation-history."³⁸⁰

In v. 24a, Paul thus states his belief in a personal God before the Athenians. Being the personal Creator of everything, God is therefore also the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. Given the premise in v. 24a, the statement of v. 24b seems to be a logical and natural consequence. The sovereign Creator, who is Lord of the Universe, clearly does not live in 'man-made' temples. This temple-critique was uttered nearby Parthenon and in the midst of all the other religious altars and images in Athens.³⁸¹ Nevertheless, Paul's refutation of any attempt to limit or localize the Creator would be acceptable to the Athenian philosophers (esp. the Epicureans), at least on the surface.³⁸² On a deeper level, though, as indicated by the following verses, Paul's creational monotheism not only rules out polytheistic paganism (see 3.4.3) but also challenges both Stoic pantheism and Epicurean deism (see 3.4.4.3).

17.25 οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενός τινος, α
 ὑτὸς διδούς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα·

³⁸⁰ Schütz 1986:407-408.

³⁸¹ Hemer 1989a:118.

Textual comments:

1. οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων

χειρ ἀνθρωπίνη is an idiom (lit. 'human hands'; cf. v. 24b) for 'a human being as a means of accomplishing something' (Louw-Nida 9.5), possibly in contrast to the divine hands of the Creator (cf. v. 24a).

2. θεραπεύεται

The word θεραπεύω means 'to serve (a divinity)'. This critique of the thought that God should need anything (and therefore a critique of sacrifices), is found in Is. 46:1, Jer. 10:5; Ps. 50:9-12 (cf. also Mic. 6:6ff) as well as in 2 Macc. 14:35 and e.g. Euripides *Heracl.* 1345-46 and Plato *Euthphr.* 14 C.

3. προσδεόμενός τινος

'As if he needed anything'; from προσδέομαι, i.e. 'to need (in addition/further)'. The emphasis here is on God's self-sufficiency as the sovereign Creator and Lord of the Universe. The Epicureans would have agreed with the notion that God (or the gods) has no need of anything.

4. αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα

This triad (ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα) about God as the source (i.e. the giver; use

³⁸² See e.g. Stott 1990:285 and Larsson 1987:389.

of δίδωμι) of life may be adapted from current terminology. But the actual content may be found in Gen. 2:7ff; Is. 42:5; Ps. 50:7-15; Neh. 9:6 (cf. also 1 Sam. 2:6) as well as in 2 Macc. 7:23; and 3 Macc. 2:9. Cf. also *Corp. Herm.* 5;10. 'Zoe' (i.e. the Greek word for 'life') was popularly associated with 'Zeus', and it is therefore possible that Paul implicitly says, 'Not Zeus but Yahweh is the source of life!'³⁸³ The expression ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν is an example of "intentional assonance"³⁸⁴. The Stoics would have agreed with the notion that the divine being is the source of all life (see also below on v. 28).

Critical comments:

Paul continues his *probatio* by refuting in v. 25a the opinion that God needs any sacrifices. God does not need the service of humankind, as if the sovereign Creator and Lord was dependent on his creatures. The premise for this critique is found in v. 25b, where Paul introduces God as the source of life (as expressed in the significant triad ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα). The point is that God is the Sustainer of everything and therefore is in no need of anything. Carson points to the crucial theological and apologetic importance of this verse:

"This passage not only insists that God sustains life and rules providentially, but that he is characterized by aseity... It means that God is so independent that he does not need us. We cannot give him anything he lacks, or wheedle something out of him by cajoling him."³⁸⁵

³⁸³ See Marshall 1980:287.

³⁸⁴ Bruce 1990a:382.

³⁸⁵ Carson 1996b:500. Carson explains God's *aseity* as God's self-existence, "from the Latin *a*

The implication for humanity is clear; since God is "the giver of life and 'everything' we are and have, we should love, trust and obey God"³⁸⁶.

The emphasis of 17:24-25 is thus on God as the sovereign Creator and source of life. Humanity should not (as popular Athenian religion had done) seek to localize God in temples or manipulate him by sacrifices. *These verses constitute a formal unit within the speech, with a clear chiastic structure. This composition is indicated by the following outline:*

- a) 17:24a Premise (for v. 24b): God is sovereign Creator and Lord.
- b) 17:24b First critique: Therefore, he does not live in temples.
- c) 17:25a Second critique: God does not need humanity's service/sacrifices.
- d) 17:25b Premise (for v. 25b): God is totally independent as the source of life.

It seems, then, as if Paul's intention in vv. 24-25, at the surface level, is to seek to establish as much common ground as possible in relation to his philosophical audience. As shown above, these verses clearly play on: a) the Epicurean belief that God (or the gods) needs nothing from human beings, as well as b) the Stoic belief that the divine being is the source of all life. The sophisticated audience would thus largely regard the critique of popular polytheism so far in the speech as plausible. The underlying biblical dynamic view of God, however, as both transcendent Creator and immanent Sustainer, would challenge their

³⁸⁶ *sc* ("from himself") (Carson 1996b:223); see also 6.2.2.2.

³⁸⁶ Krodel 1986:333.

philosophical systems deeply.³⁸⁷ *Implied here, then, seems to be a simultaneous affirmation of Epicurean deism and Stoic pantheism as 'half-truths', needing to be modified and corrected in the light of Paul's Judeo-Christian creational monotheism.* At a deeper level, then, these verses signal a confrontation with these influential Athenian worldviews.

4.4.2.2 *The probatio II, 17:26-27 – On divine intentions with humanity*

17.26 ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς
 προσώπου τῆς γῆς, ὀρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας
 τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν

Textual comments:

1. ἐποίησέν

ποιέω (to 'make', 'create') should be taken as the main verb (with ὁ θεὸς in v. 24 as the subject) with two dependent and parallel infinitives (κατοικεῖν in v. 26 and ζητεῖν in v. 27) expressing purpose. "Gott hat die Menschheit geschaffen, um ihr - so die beiden finalen Infinitive - eine doppelte Bestimmung zu geben: Sie soll die Erde bewohnen und ihn suchen."³⁸⁸

2. τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων

³⁸⁷ Larsson 1987:389.

God created ἐξ ἑνὸς³⁸⁹ ('from one [man]'), i.e. from Adam (though his name is not mentioned³⁹⁰) as "the single progenitor of the human race"³⁹¹. Paul probably relates the Genesis material (cf. Gen. 1-2 ; Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:45-49) to Hellenistic myths about the primal man and to the Stoic conception of the unity of all human beings. God has created πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων, which could be rendered either "the whole race of men" or "every nation of men"³⁹². The second alternative should be preferred in the light of a) 2:5, 10:35 and 14:16 and b) of Paul's emphasis here being on unity in diversity. Rajak remarks that it is "noteworthy that ... Paul draws the attention of his hearers to the racial variety of human beings in the world (the Greek word is *ethnos*), when he tells them that all races were created by God from a common origin".³⁹³

3. κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς

Humanity is created with a purpose, i.e. to 'inhabit' (κατοικεῖν) 'the whole (face of the) earth' (παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς). This expression underlines God's providence for all humanity (cf. v. 26b) and emphasizes that wherever people are, they have the same origin in the one and only God. It also functions as a contrast to v. 24b about God. There is

³⁸⁸ Roloff 1981:262. See also Conzelmann 1987:142 and Krodel 1986:333.

³⁸⁹ See the text-critical discussion in 4.2.2.

³⁹⁰ This corresponds to the subtle introduction of Jesus (as 'the second Adam') in v. 31; see further 4.4.3.

³⁹¹ Stott 1990:285.

³⁹² The first alternative is preferred by e.g. Dibelius 1956:27-38 and the second by e.g. Bruce 1990a:383. Conzelmann remarks that there in fact seems to be "little difference between the two alternatives" (Conzelmann 1987:142).

³⁹³ Rajak 1995:2.

alliteration with initial π.

4. ὁρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν. God has determined (ὁρίζω meaning to 'determine', 'appoint', 'designate'³⁹⁴, cf. v. 31) specific times (προστεταγμένους καιροὺς) for humankind and lit. 'the boundaries of their inhabitation' (τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν). The meaning of these expressions is highly disputed. The καιροὶ ('periods') and ὁροθεσία ('boundaries') could be interpreted in two different ways: a) As *the order of history*, alluding to Deut. 32:8 (i.e. God has set specific times and borders for the nations; cf. Gen. 10), or b) As *the order of creation*, alluding to Ps. 74:17 (i.e. God has set specific seasons and places adequate for human habitation; cf. Is. 45:18; Gen. 8:22).

Both interpretations seem possible, and "the point in any case is the goodness of God in providing for the needs of mankind".³⁹⁵ The most natural interpretation, however, seems to be the order of creation: (1) This view is in accord with the parallel passage in Acts 14:17. (2) This interpretation fits the wider context and theme of the speech, with its explicit emphasis on creation. (3) The goodness of God in creation (v. 26a) is a natural premise for seeking God (v. 27a). (4) The notion of divine providence in creation is a crucial point of

³⁹⁴ Bruce points out that aorist participle is used (ὁρίσας) to indicate that, in the Divine plan, the determination of a home for humanity preceded its creation. (Bruce 1990a:383)

³⁹⁵ Marshall 1980:288. For the order of history, see e.g. Gärtner 1955:147-152; Schneider, G. 1982:240; Bruce 1990a:383; Scott 1994:541-543; and Witherington 1998:526-528. For the order of creation, see e.g. Haenchen 1977:503; Marshall 1980:288; Roloff 1981:262; Weiser 1985:471;

continuity and contact with Stoicism.

Critical comments:

Paul continues his *probatio* by moving from the doctrine of God to the doctrine of humanity, following on from the emphasis on God as the Sustainer of humanity in v. 25b. The apostle asserts the unity of all human beings, on the basis of being created by the one, true God from one man (v. 26a). Paul's statement would challenge the Athenians, since they considered themselves *αυτοχθονες* (i.e. sprung from the soil of their native Attica).³⁹⁶ The statement that humanity covers the earth, which is seen as God's first intention with humankind (cf. Gen. 1:28), further underlines the universal aspect. In the next phrase (v. 26b), Paul proclaims that God has provided humanity with stability through the order of creation. God's goodness is evident in his present provision for the needs of humanity. This statement would be affirmed by the Stoics, but would deeply challenge the deistic thinking of Paul's Epicurean listeners (cf. v. 27b).

The intention of this verse, then, is to affirm "the horizontal dimension of God's purpose"³⁹⁷ with all of humanity (characterized by unity in diversity): to fill the earth and to live according to the order of creation, which the Creator has designed for human beings. This implies that the one, true God cannot properly or justly be described as a 'foreign' God

Pesch 1986:137; and Larsson 1987:390.

³⁹⁶ This was "a claim reflecting the fact that they belonged to the earliest wave of Greek immigration into the land, so early that, unlike later arrivals, the Achaeans and Dorians, they had lost all memory of their immigration." (Bruce 1990a:382; see also Krodel 1986:333-334.)

³⁹⁷ Krodel 1986:334.

(cf. v. 18ff). "Thus not only is there no room for racism or elitist tribalism, but one of the entailments of monotheism is that if there is one God he must in some sense be God of all, whether acknowledged or not."³⁹⁸

17.27 ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὔροιεν, καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα.

Textual comments:

1. ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν

The infinitive ζητεῖν ('seek', 'search', 'look for') expresses God's purpose when creating human beings, i.e. to seek God (τὸν θεόν). ζητέω is a pregnant term, which is used in the LXX and the NT to denote the human response (indicating a response of the whole person) to God's actions initiated for his salvation.³⁹⁹ It is used in Hellenistic literature to describe the rational search for what is true and divine. The idea and vocabulary of seeking God is found in texts such as Is. 45:19; 55:6; 65:1; Ps. 14:2; Pr. 8:17; Jer. 29:13; Am. 9:12, as well as in Plato *Apol.* 19b, 23b and Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 12:60. Paul's usage of ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν is clearly derived from the biblical material (where humanity's response includes the rational⁴⁰⁰), and is here used in 'polemical engagement' (see 3.4.4.3) with the

³⁹⁸ Carson 1996b:500. See also 6.2.2.2.

³⁹⁹ Larsson 1987:380,390.

⁴⁰⁰ It seems that many commentators tend to downplay the rational element in the biblical material, both in terms of God's revelation and of humanity's responses to God. Neither a rationalistic nor a fideistic/existentialistic interpretation of seeking (v. 27), conversion (v. 30) or

impersonal, rationalistic notion of seeking the divine (probably), held by the philosophical audience.

2. εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὕροιεν

Paul introduces εὕρισκω (to 'find', 'discover', 'come upon'; here used in the optative mood) as an appropriate counterpart to ζητεῖν. Gempf perceptively remarks, however, that

"the verb for 'finding' is weakened in three ways. The first is the grammatical construction: the use of the optative mood in Greek [εὕροιεν] introduces a note of uncertainty, coupled with a phrase (εἰ ἄρα γε), which is best translated 'if perhaps'. The finding is by no means certain. Second, the force of the verb is weakened by being paired with the colorful verb 'groping' (ψηλαφάω), a word used in such sources as Homer's *Odyssey* (9.416) and the Greek version of Deuteronomy (LXX 28:29) to mean a 'blind feeling around'. Third, the verb phrase is followed by the clause 'although he is not far'. The concessive nature of this clause only makes sense if the 'groping' is unsuccessful."⁴⁰¹

In this context, then, ψηλαφάω (usually meaning 'touching with hands') should be understood as 'feeling around'. Implied here is a dramatic description of "the groping of a blind person or the fumbling of a person in the darkness of night"⁴⁰².

πίστις (v. 31) is warranted. As Hemer argues (over against the treatment of πίστις and its cognates in some of the theological dictionaries); "faith as trust is stressed to the initial exclusion of faith as assent, but the New Testament argument is for trust which goes beyond (but includes) assent to a practical sufficiency of relevant evidence" (Hemer 1989a:441).

⁴⁰¹ Gempf 1993a:52. It should be noted that Gempf's third comment, strictly speaking, belongs to the next textual comment.

⁴⁰² Witherington 1998:528, where also additional evidence from classical and biblical sources for this usage can be found.

3. καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα

As indicated above (see previous comment), καί γε should be seen as concessive, as in 21:17. The use of ὑπάρχω indicates a formal style (cf. vv. 24 and 29). This subordinate participle is most naturally seen as a contrast to v. 27a. Paul includes himself in this expression ('though he is not far from each one of us'). So, God is near (*contra* Epicurean deism), because he is the truly personal God (*contra* Stoic pantheism). Cf. also Ps. 139 (LXX 138):7-10.

Critical comments:

This verse, which is closely linked both grammatically and logically to the preceding verse, states that God's prime intention in creation is that humanity shall seek God (v. 27a). The premise given here is that God is not far away (v. 27b).

This verse emphasizes the following crucial points about God and humanity: (1) The sovereign Creator and Sustainer made men and women (v. 26) so that they would seek him. That was his prime intention with humankind or "the vertical dimension of his purpose"⁴⁰³. Human beings seek God on the basis of God's self-revelation of his "eternal power and divine nature" (Rom. 1:19f) in creation. (2) Even though being made by God and totally dependent on him, humanity seems nevertheless to be unable to find God on the basis of general revelation alone, though he remains very close to each one (vv. 27b-28). As Pesch asserts; "Mit der Nähe der Schöpfers kollidiert die Gottesferne des in der

‘Unwissenheit’ (v. 30) befangenen Menschen.”⁴⁰⁴ (3) Humankind cannot find God, the reason for that being the 'blind feeling around'. This is a strong statement about the human predicament, i.e. the claim that humanity is basically flawed, not only because of ignorance but also because of blindness. Paul here seems to be hinting at rebellion – or sin – as the deepest problem behind humanity's blindness.

Paul is therefore challenging the critical and curious Athenian audience at this point by implicitly suggesting the following about seeking and finding God: God, who he is and what he really is, cannot be discovered by popular religion or sophisticated philosophy. Therefore, in order for God to be found, God himself would have to make a move, i.e. to reveal himself. This verse clearly indicates that there is "a groping for God in the darkness, when the light of special revelation is not available"⁴⁰⁵. Humankind is thus described as seeking God without actually finding him, a situation characterized by irony and tragedy. This implies that humanity is seen as "blindly and unsuccessfully groping for someone who stands so close and who desires to be found"⁴⁰⁶.

*We may thus conclude, on the basis of the preceding discussion, that 17:26-27 constitutes a grammatical and logical unity within the speech. The overall argument of these verses on God and humanity could be expressed structurally in the following way:*⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³ Krodel 1986:334.

⁴⁰⁴ Pesch 1986:138.

⁴⁰⁵ Bruce 1990a:383.

⁴⁰⁶ Gempf 1993a:52. See also Marshall 1980:288 and Gärtner 1955:160-161.

⁴⁰⁷ It should be noted that this structure is slightly different to Yeo's outline (see 3.5.1.3), since he takes v. 27b as belonging to vv. 28-29.

- a) 17:26a God created humanity as a unity.
- b) 17:26b God's first intention with humanity: to fill/cover the earth.
- c) 17:26c God is supplying order and stability in the order of creation.
- d) 17:27a God's prime intention with humanity: to seek God.
- e) 17:27b Premise (for v. 27a): God is near (but humanity is blind).

4.4.2.3 *The probatio III, 17:28-29 – On the nature of humanity*

17.28 Ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν, ὥς καὶ τινες τῶν κ
αθ' ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν, Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

Textual comments:

1. Ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν

γὰρ connects this verse to the previous one, thereby indicating in what sense God is near.

The triadic formula about human existence (ζάω, i.e. 'to live'; κινέω, i.e. 'to move

(about)' ⁴⁰⁸; εἰμι, i.e. 'to be') in God is probably not a literal quotation from Stoic

philosophy, for there is no consensus as to its source.⁴⁰⁹ The expression ἐν αὐτῷ, when

⁴⁰⁸ "A strictly literal translation of κινέω in Ac 17.28 might imply merely moving from one place to another. The meaning, however, is generalized movement and activity; therefore, it may be possible to translate κινούμεθα as 'we come and go' or 'we move about' or even 'we do what we do'." (Louw-Nida 15.1)

⁴⁰⁹ See the discussion in Bruce 1990a:384. It is possible that this is an allusion to a poem originally addressed to Zeus, and usually attributed to the Cretan poet Epimenides, and which is quoted in Titus 1:12. If so, this would be additional evidence for a "Pauline context, where Paul is interacting with the specific traditions of Athenian religion" (Hemer 1989a:118), since Epimenides

used by Paul, should not be taken in a pantheistic sense but as denoting humanity's living in God's presence and having existence through him (cf. Deut. 4:7; Ps. 139:5; Rom. 11:36). Paul seems thus to be using a common vocabulary (here probably with Greek thinking in general) and a commonly used form (the triad) to express humanity's total dependence on God. Gärtner points out that the triadic formula is a reminder of the Jewish attack on idolatry: The idols lack life, they cannot move, and they have no real existence.⁴¹⁰

2. ὥς καί τινες τῶν καθ' ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν

This phrase, though plural in form (τινες τῶν καθ' ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν), should probably be taken as a way of introducing one single quotation. Paul introduces the quotation in the latter part of the verse as an appeal to an authority, which gives this quotation a somewhat similar argumentative function in this pagan context as that of an OT quotation in the synagogue context (see also v. 23). Conzelmann remarks that the quotation "serves both as proof and explanation"⁴¹¹ in the speech.

3. Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἔσμεν⁴¹²

τοῦ here means τοῦτου (BDF § 249). This quotation is "die erste Hälfte einer

figures in Diogenes Laertius' story of the origin of the altars. As Witherington notes, however, Epimenides was no Stoic. (See Witherington 1998:530.)

⁴¹⁰ Gärtner 1955:197,222.

⁴¹¹ Conzelmann 1987:145.

⁴¹² For a very helpful discussion on the Aratus quotation, see Lövestam 1988:289-91.

griechischen Hexameter-Ziele"⁴¹³, undoubtedly taken from Paul's fellow Cilician, the Stoic poet Aratus' poem *Phaen.* 5 (from about 270 B.C.), although a similar line may be found in Cleanthes' somewhat earlier *Hymn to Zeus* 4. This quotation, with the ambiguous term γένος ('offspring'), was used apologetically already by the Jewish Hellenistic apologist Aristobolus (in *fragm.* 4) "to interpret the biblical creation story"⁴¹⁴. "Being God's offspring", then, as Krodel points out, "does not imply that we have a divine spark within us, be it an immortal soul or a divine logos. But ...it means that we are dependent on God."⁴¹⁵ Humanity is thus God's offspring, since both man and woman are created in the image of God. Ladd comments perceptively:

"Here is a theology of the universal Fatherhood of God; and it follows that all men, being the creatures of the one God, are brothers. However, this is a theology of creation, not of redemption. In this theology man's sonship to God is a universal truth that belongs to all men by nature, and since men are intrinsically the children of God, this fact should be determinative of their attitude toward God and of their relationship to one another."⁴¹⁶

Critical comments:

Paul now moves from the doctrine of humankind to humanity's relation to God. Following on from the hints given in v. 25b and v. 27c, this verse emphasises humanity's total dependence on God.

⁴¹³ Roloff 1981:264.

⁴¹⁴ Eusebius *Praep. Evang.* 13.12.3; cf. Krodel 1986:336 and Gempf 1993a:53.

⁴¹⁵ Krodel 1986:336.

⁴¹⁶ Ladd 1974:160.

Paul is clearly in search of common ground and is using pagan sources to bridge some gaps. By using a common vocabulary and form (as in the triad) and an argument from one of their authorities (the Stoic Aratus), Paul is able to argue for biblical truth⁴¹⁷ with the Athenians on their high ground. The apostle is thus able to find a crucial 'point of continuity and contact' in the Stoic view of providence. Humanity is totally dependent on the Deity. Paul's strategy here is reminiscent of Hellenistic Jewish apologists.

At the same time, there is an underlying 'point of discontinuity and tension' in terms of the nature of this Deity, once again challenging both Stoic pantheism and Epicurean deism.

"The poets are actually praising Zeus, but Paul makes it clear that he treats the quotations as referring to their highest conception of the supreme God, or rather their non-conception, the unknown God, of whom he proceeded to speak."⁴¹⁸

Whereas the Greeks (especially in the neo-Platonic and Stoic traditions) tended to think of the divine nature of humanity, Paul's thinking was in terms of man and woman made in the image of God. The content and logic of v. 28 is thus clearly that of Judeo-Christian monotheism along the lines of Genesis 1-2, with its emphasis on a) being, order and life in God and b) humanity as made in the image of God.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Sherlock comments on the triad: "In its extreme form this can become monism or pantheism, but in essence it expresses classical trinitarian language about God, as Persons in relationships." (Sherlock 1996:209)

⁴¹⁸ Wright, J. S. in Schneider, J. et al 1986:85.

⁴¹⁹ Blocher comments perceptively on the crucial move in Paul's argument in v. 28 when seen in the light of the opening chapters of Genesis: "The apostle Paul, having stressed that in God we have life, movement (which is not so very far from order) and being, moves on to mankind's

17.29 γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν χρυσῷ ἢ ἄ
ργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ, χαράγματι τέχνης καὶ ἐνθυμήσεως ἀνθρώπου, τὸ θεῖον εἶ
ναι ὅμοιον.

Textual comments:

1. γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ

οὖν ('therefore') links v. 29 with v. 28, with a repetition of the quotation from Aratus. This time the more formal ὑπάρχω is used (cf. v. 24 and v. 27).

2. οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν ... τὸ θεῖον εἶναι ὅμοιον

νομίζειν ('to think, believe, hold, consider') is here used about idolatrous thinking about the Deity. This critique of idolatry resembles passages such as Gen. 20:4; Deut. 5:8; Is. 44:9-20; Ps. 115:4 (LXX 113:12); 135:15 (LXX 134:15) as well as Wis. 13-15. The expression οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν ('ought not to think') "should be seen as logical persuasion, given that his audience conceded that the premise of the poets was correct"⁴²⁰.

The use of the neutral τὸ θεῖον (*hapax legomena* in the NT) is probably stylistically – and not theologically - motivated, and should thus be read as "an idiomatic Greek touch"⁴²¹.

situation: 'We are his offspring'." (Blocher 1984:78)

⁴²⁰ Winter 1991:126.

⁴²¹ Bruce 1990a:385.

3. χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ

Of idols made of gold (χρυσός), silver (ἄργυρος) or stone (λίθος). Bruce remarks that "even if pagan philosophers rationalize the images as material symbols of the invisible divinity, the great bulk of the worshipers will pay divine homage to the images themselves".⁴²²

4. χαράγματι τέχνης καὶ ἐνθυμήσεως ἀνθρώπου

The expression refers to images (of idols) fashioned (χαράγμα, here "used in the sense of handiwork, creation, produced by the artist or craftsman"⁴²³) by the skill (τέχνη) and thought (ἐνθύμησις) of humanity (ἀνθρώπου).

Critical comments:

The Aratus quotation (from v. 28b) is repeated in v. 29a, this time functioning as a premise for the strong critique of idolatry in v. 29b. The logic of Paul's argument seems to be that, since human beings are living, God the Creator of humanity must be a living personal God. Consequently, this "living and life-giving deity"⁴²⁴ must be greater, not less, than his creatures, and should thus not be thought of or depicted as a material image. Thus, God created humanity, not the other way round.

⁴²² Bruce 1988:340.

This explicit strong critique of pagan idolatry (see 3.4.3.1) was appropriate in Athens (a setting characterized by Luke in v. 16 as κατείδωλος, 'full of idols'), and was to a certain extent reminiscent of Greek philosophical critique (in the Socratic tradition) of popular religion.

"The idea that God cannot be depicted struck a chord among educated Greeks; but it was to just such that the speech before the Areopagus sought to present an apology for Christianity as the model of the only true worship of the 'unknown god'."⁴²⁵

This verse, however, also functions as an implicit critique of Stoic and Epicurean accommodation to popular religious pluralism. Both philosophical schools seem to have endorsed religious pluralism in order to maintain their following. This became especially important in the imperial period, "given the growing cult of the veneration of the deceased emperors"⁴²⁶.

This challenging of idolatry⁴²⁷ and of religious pluralism was thus an integral part of Paul's public presentation to pagans. This is clearly seen also in the parallel passages in Acts 14:15 and 1 Thess. 1:9 with the emphasis on 'turning from idols' (see 3.3.3.1 and

⁴²³ Martin, R. 1986:574.

⁴²⁴ Winter 1996:85.

⁴²⁵ Beyreuther & Finkenrath 1986:503.

⁴²⁶ Winter 1991:126-127. See also 3.4.4.1.

⁴²⁷ Stott summarizes the argumentative thrust of vv. 24-29: "All idolatry, whether ancient or modern, primitive or sophisticated, is inexcusable, whether the images are metal or mental, material objects of worship or unworthy concepts in the mind. For idolatry is the attempt either to localize God ... or to domesticate God ... or to alienate God ... or to dethrone God." (Stott 1990:287) See further the discussion in 5.3.1.1 on idolatry and apologetics.

3.5.2.1). The notion of νομίζειν in v. 29 is preparing the way for the topic of conversion in v. 30, since the latter term both involves a change of thinking and of living.

This verse, then, functions as a transitional verse in Paul's argument. It seems to have a dual function, both as concluding the argument in vv. 24-29 and as introducing the argument in vv. 29-31. *We may thus conclude that 17:28-29 constitutes a unit of its own in the speech both grammatically and logically, concerning humanity's relation to God:*

- a) 17:28a A common triadic formula: Human existence in God.
- b) 17:28b Proof (quotation): Humanity is God's offspring.
- c) 17:29a Premise: Humanity is God's offspring (repeated).
- d) 17:29b Consequence: The Sovereign Deity is not like idols.

4.4.3 Peroratio, 17:30-31 – Challenging to response(s)

17.30 τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεὸς, τὰ νῦν παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν,

Textual comments:

1. μὲν οὖν τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας

The expression μὲν οὖν ('so', 'therefore' or not translated) denotes a continuation in argument from v. 29. χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας lit. means 'times of ignorance'. It refers to Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ and ἀγνοοῦντες in v. 23 and describes the Athenian idolatry in the past (cf. v. 29) before the arrival of the Christian gospel (cf. v. 18 and vv. 30b-31). The

emphasis here is that the knowledge of God was available, but suppressed (see Rom. 1:18ff and 3.3.3.4).

2. ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεὸς

God has overlooked (ὑπεροράω, to 'overlook', 'disregard', 'pass over';⁴²⁸ *hapax legomena* in NT) their ignorance. God's patience and forbearance in view of the coming judgement is expressed in Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18 as well as Wis. 11:23; 13-6-9. (Cf. also Acts 3:17, 14:16, and esp. Rom. 3:25.) The emphasis here is on the reasons for the delaying of divine judgment, both in view of their idolatry in general and their specific altar to 'The unknown god' as a safety precaution (cf. v. 23 and 3.4.3.2). As Gempf observes;

"Faced with a man who argued that all these precautions were in error and therefore presumably ineffective, any good pagan would have demanded; 'If we are so wrong, then why is there no catastrophe, no plague?' It is this question to which the speech responds. That there was no catastrophe was not due, as they thought, to the effectiveness of their idol-worship, but rather to God's mercy in overlooking their ignorance. [But] ... the catastrophe will not be held back for ever ..."⁴²⁹

3. τὰ νῦν

νῦν means 'now'. τὰ νῦν means 'but now' or 'as far as the present situation is concerned';

⁴²⁸ It's possible that the oratees could have heard the meaning 'overlook', whereas the narratees could have interpreted it (in the light of Is. 58:7) as 'despise' or 'd disdain'. In that case, the narratees "are being reminded that God has always been provoked to anger and jealousy by worship of the idol he abhors (Deut. 32:16)" (Gibson 2000:321).

⁴²⁹ Gempf 1994:1094.

(cf. 4:29; 20:32; 27:22⁴³⁰ and Rom. 3:21). It expresses a crucial turningpoint in the history of humanity as well as in the speech.

4. παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν

In contrast to v. 30a, this phrase expresses God's present command (παραγγέλλω means to 'command', 'order') or will, stressing its content (μετανοέω is 'to change one's mind, repent, be converted'; cf. 2:38; 3:19; 20:21 and Is. 46:8(LXX), 1 Thess. 1:9-10 and 2 Pet. 3:9) and its universality (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ, i.e. to everyone everywhere; cf. Is. 45:15-24). As in v. 26, there is alliteration on πας. The emphasis on repentance is highly significant, and includes

"... two movements here; one, to turn from idols made with hands or the imagination of humans; two, to turn to the living God who raised Jesus from the dead and appointed him to be the judge of all forms of idolatry."⁴³¹

Ultimately, then, repentance is seen as the only appropriate human response to the one, true God.

Critical comments:

Paul's main point in the *exordium* (vv. 22b-23) and the *probatio* (vv. 24-29) is that "for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:6a). In the *peroratio* (vv. 30-31) he presents the consequences of this radical Judeo-

⁴³⁰ Larsson points out that the expression τὰ νῦν in Acts has the function of strongly

Christian monotheism in the light of the distinctive Christian gospel about 'Jesus and the Resurrection'. This final part of the speech should thus "not be seen as anomalous, or a mere tacking on of a Christian addendum to an otherwise Hellenistic piece of rhetoric".⁴³²

In v. 30, Paul moves from the past status (when God overlooked times of ignorance) to the present status (when God commands all to repent). The point of this verse seems to be both to explain why punishment is delayed, given the conditions of ignorance and idolatry already described, and to stress the responsibility of the Athenians. As Carson suggests, what Paul means is that

"God graciously overlooked their ignorance in the past, however culpable their ignorance was, for he did not punish them instantly, but in his forbearance 'left the sins committed beforehand unpunished' (Rom. 3:25). Now, however, as salvation has been brought near, so also has judgment drawn close. That is a characteristic of realized eschatology in the New Testament: the blessings of the age to come have dawned, but concomitantly the dangers have increased proportionately."⁴³³

The fact that God, according to v. 30a, has overlooked past times of ignorance is a clear and strong statement about his mercy. At the same time, Paul is 'now' charging his listeners, both with popular idolatry and with the philosophers' accommodation to popular piety. This 'now' constitutes a clear turning point in the speech, where Paul in the *peroratio* stresses 'the points of discontinuity and tension' quite explicitly. The emphasis in v. 30b is on the universality of the summons to repentance, arguing on the basis of the unity of

emphasizing the new situation, which is the result of Christ's coming; see (Larsson 1987:380).

⁴³¹ Krodel 1986:338. See further the exegetical comments below (in 4.4.3) on v. 31.

⁴³² Witherington 1998:531.

humanity previously asserted. The personal Creator is now commanding everyone everywhere to repent, i.e. to change one's ways of thinking and living in the light of Paul's message. Thus, conversion to "a new worldview, not merely additional knowledge, is required"⁴³⁴.

This verse, then, has a crucial function in Paul's speech, stressing both God's mercy and his present command to repentance for all of humanity. The verse functions – in the light of Paul's rhetorical strategy – as a real challenge to the Athenians to reconsider their ways of thinking and living in view of the revealed person and will of the one true God. Implicit here is a strong notion of 'epistemic obligation', parallel to the emphasis in Rom. 1:20 on εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους.

17.31 καθότι ἔστησεν ἡμέραν ἐν ᾗ μέλλει κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δ
 δικαιοσύνῃ ἐν ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὥρισεν, πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν ἀναστήσας α
 υἱὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.

Textual comments:

1. καθότι

καθότι means 'because', 'for', 'as', 'in so far as', and should here be translated as 'for'. It has a crucial role, since it links v. 31 to the previous verse and thereby introduces the reason for

⁴³³ Carson 1996b:310. See also 6.2.2.2.

the strong statement in v. 30b.

2. ἔστησεν ἡμέραν ἐν ᾗ μέλλει⁴³⁵ κρίνειν

Paul clearly uses judicial language in this phrase. God has appointed (ἵστημι) a day (ἡμέρα) of judgment (κρίνω means to 'judge', 'pass judgment on' and "is very frequently used in the NT in a strictly judicial sense"⁴³⁶). Cf. Amos 5:18; Is. 2:12 as well as Rom. 2:5,16; 1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6,10; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2:2. Winter points out that "the theme of judgment presented common ground between Paul and his Stoic audience"⁴³⁷.

3. τὴν οἰκουμένην

The world (οἰκουμένη), i.e. humanity or humankind as a totality, will be judged. The topic of judgment is thus a crucial part of the apostolic witness to Gentiles, cf. 10:42 and 1 Thess. 1:10 (cf. 3.3.3.1).

4. ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ

God will judge with justice (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ). The topic of a righteous divine judgment is found in the OT, see esp. Ps. 9:8 (LXX 9:9); 95 (LXX 96):13; and 98 (LXX 97):9. For

⁴³⁴ Witherington 1998:531.

⁴³⁵ Schneider notes that μέλλω is used "in the context of events which happens according to the will and decree of God" and occurs here "in the context of God's action in grace and judgment" (Schneider, W. 1986a:326).

⁴³⁶ Schneider, W. 1986b:365.

⁴³⁷ Winter 1991:122.

Paul, as Bruce underlines, the day of Yahweh is 'the day of Jesus'.⁴³⁸

5. ἐν ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὥρισεν

The use of ἐν here is instrumental, "denoting personal agency"⁴³⁹. Jesus is introduced into the speech as 'the personal agent' of divine judgment in a rather cryptic and indirect way, i.e. as a man (ἀνὴρ) God has appointed (ὀρίζω, cf. v. 26⁴⁴⁰ and 10:42). Cf. esp. Rom. 1:4 "where the verb [ὀρίζω] is used, as here, in reference to the evidential power of the resurrection"⁴⁴¹. This expression is probably primarily an allusion to the Adam-Christ-typology (cf. v. 26)⁴⁴², but could also refer implicitly to the Son of Man as the eschatological judge in Dan. 7:13-14⁴⁴³. The emphasis on the humanity of Jesus should be understood in the light of v. 18 and v. 29: Jesus was not a lifeless idol simply to be added to the pantheon as yet another 'god'.

6. πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν

God has furnished or offered (παρέχω means to 'grant', 'offer', 'present') proof (πίστις; here: not 'faith' but 'assurance', 'proof', 'evidence', or according to Louw-Nida (31.43) 'what

⁴³⁸ See Bruce 1990a:386.

⁴³⁹ Harris 1986:1210.

⁴⁴⁰ Dulon comments on the use of ὀρίζω in v.26 and v.31: "After God had 'determined' allotted periods and boundaries for the men that he had created so that they should seek him, he 'appointed' a man to judge the world on the day appointed for it (Acts 17:26, 31)." (Dulon 1986:473)

⁴⁴¹ Bruce 1990a:386.

⁴⁴² See e.g. Larsson 1987:395.

⁴⁴³ See e.g. Bruce 1990a:386.

can be fully believed', 'that which is worthy of belief') for all (πᾶσιν). Again, one should notice both the alliteration on π. and a significant use of legal language in the apologetic argument.⁴⁴⁴ This usage of πίστις (probably *hapax legomena* in the NT) seems to be inadequately treated in the theological dictionaries (cf. the comments to 17:27). An identical sense, however, is found in Plato *Phaed.* 70.B, Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.1, 3.13, and Josephus *Ant.* 2.218. Such usage would therefore be "natural enough in [an] address to a Gentile audience"⁴⁴⁵. In this speech, then, as Hemer emphasizes, πίστις "expresses an idea of 'proof' or the 'confirmation of truth', which is intimately linked to the concept of 'witness' as testimony to the truth, a motif widespread in Luke and John"⁴⁴⁶. Thus, an intentional reference to the credibility of the eyewitnesses (as emphasized by Luke elsewhere; see e.g. Acts 1:3,22; 2:32) is probably implied here.

7. ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν

God raised (ἀνίστημι, meaning to 'raise (from the dead)') him (αὐτὸν) from the dead (ἐκ νεκρῶν); cf. vv. 18 and 32. "Wie in manchen anderen urchristlichen Verkündigungsaussagen vor Heiden kommt die Auferweckung Jesu zusammen mit seiner

⁴⁴⁴ The use of judicial language (πίστιν παρασχών) in this non-forensic setting should be seen as a crucial example of how the New Testament primarily seem to describe apologetics in legal (and not in military) metaphors. The emphasis is thus on arguments and evidence.

⁴⁴⁵ Hemer 1989a:441. See also BAGD πίστις 1c.

⁴⁴⁶ Hemer 1989a:441. He refers to Trites 1977; see also the references to Trites in 2.2.3 and 2.2.4.

Funktion als endzeitlicher Richter zur Sprache."⁴⁴⁷ The apostles understood the Resurrection as an eschatological event, where Jesus was vindicated as the true Messiah (of Israel) and the unique Lord and Judge (of humanity). The Greek audience in Athens, on the other hand, would have been influenced by traditional ideas of the transmigration of souls. There was no concept of a general resurrection in Greek thinking, and it was only referred to resurrection "a. as an impossibility, or b. as an isolated miracle of resuscitation".⁴⁴⁸ This Greek background explains why Paul had to deal with the misunderstanding (v. 18) in the light of key Judeo-Christian beliefs (vv. 24-31).

Critical comments:

After having stressed the logic of Judeo-Christian monotheism (v. 30), Paul continues his *peroratio* by emphasising the specific Christian *kerygma* (v. 31), i.e. "for us ... there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 8:6b). Thus, Paul finishes his speech with the coming judgment as the reason for repentance, followed by the resurrection of Jesus as the past event being evidence of this divine future judgment. Implicitly, this means that conversion is both possible and necessary 'now', before the final divine judgment.

In v. 31a, Paul mentions the future judgment of God as being definite, universal and righteous. Even though the Stoics had a notion of a judgment, "Greek thought had no room

⁴⁴⁷ Weiser 1985:476. He refers esp. to 1 Thess. 1:10; Hebr. 6:1f; and Acts 10:40-42.

⁴⁴⁸ Oepke 1985:61. See also Brown in Coenen & Brown 1986:259-261. Further material on the Greek view on the afterlife is found in the exegetical comments below to v. 32 (see 4.5.1).

for such an eschatological judgment as the biblical revelation announces"⁴⁴⁹. Here, then, Paul clearly turns the tables by telling the venerable Areopagus Council that God in fact will judge them. Winter comments perceptively:

"Those who had cast Paul in the traditional role of a herald would have realised from the speech itself that it was neither he nor his 'gods' who were seeking their official *imprimatur*. Rather the hearers were under investigation, including the Stoics and Epicureans who had improperly allowed their hearers to worship idols. The indictment that all were guilty before the God of heaven and earth was secured from the teaching of their own inspired poets. It was not an official authorisation that this divinity was seeking but their repentance in order to avoid the predetermined day of the great assize at the hands of the judge, the resurrected Jesus."⁴⁵⁰

Paul moves from the divine judgment to the divinely appointed judge, simply introduced as a 'man'. This indirect way of introducing Jesus was appropriate to the rhetorical concept and strategy of *insinuatio* (see 3.5.1.4). This would imply that the primary immediate aim of Paul's speech was to promote curiosity and elicit questions.

The last phrase of Paul's speech deals with the resurrection of Jesus. It is seen as the unique historical event, which furnished proof to all of his fitness to the office as the ultimate judge of the world. As Hemer notes, it is thus "the historical facts, and that of the [supernatural] resurrection in particular, which forms the confirmation of Paul's appeal to the Athenians and the base of his argument"⁴⁵¹. As indicated in 2.2.4, Paul's arguments has at least two aspects: a) By the resurrection Jesus was vindicated, being exalted to a status

⁴⁴⁹ Bruce 1988:340-341; see also Bolt 2000:328.

⁴⁵⁰ Winter 1996:85-86.

⁴⁵¹ Hemer 1989a:442. Hemer's original text reads 'supranatural', here changed to 'supernatural'.

of lordship, and therefore having ultimate judicial authority. b) At the same time, the emphasis seems to be on the public access to the evidence of the resurrection, i.e. the possibility of testing the reliability of this unique claim. Implicit again (as in v. 30) is a strong notion of 'epistemic obligation'.

The peroratio in 17:30-31 constitutes a clear unit within the speech. The argument can be summarized as follows:

- a) 17:30a Past status: God has overlooked times of ignorance.
- b) 17:30b Present status: God commands all to repent.
- c) 17:31a Reason: God has set a day for judgment and appointed a Judge.
- d) 17:31b Evidence: God has raised the Judge from the dead.

Paul's concluding statements in v. 31 on the humanity, authority and resurrection of Jesus are stated rather indirectly, but are nevertheless at the heart of the Christian faith. We may sum up Paul's message to the pagans in Athens, in the words of N. T. Wright, as

"... a double and dramatic announcement about God: 1. The God of Israel is the one true God, and the pagan deities are mere idols. 2. The God of Israel is now made known in and through Jesus himself."⁴⁵²

It seems plausible that such a challenging message would provoke the Athenian audience to diverse reactions, as shown by the Lucan epilogue to the speech (see below).

⁴⁵² Wright 1997:60.

4.5 The Epilogue, 17:32-34

Outline:

17:32 Ambiguous reactions to Paul's speech.

17:33 Paul leaving the Areopagus Council.

17:34 Positive results of Paul's speech.

4.5.1 Ambiguous reactions to Paul's speech, 17:32

17.32 Ἀκούσαντες δὲ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν οἱ μὲν ἐχλεύαζον, οἱ δὲ εἶπαν, Ἀκουσόμεθά σου περὶ τούτου καὶ πάλιν.

Textual comments:

1. Ἀκούσαντες δὲ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν

ἀκούω means to 'hear', 'receive news of'; in this case to hear about the resurrection of Jesus. Many commentators suggest that Paul was interrupted in his speech at this point⁴⁵³, but this seems improbable (or at least unnecessary): a) In other places Luke informs his readers when this happens (cf. 22:22-24; 26:24),⁴⁵⁴ and b) Paul's speech (in Luke's condensed summary) makes sense as a coherent and intentional apologetic argument.

⁴⁵³ See e.g. Gempf 1994:1094; Horsley 1986:610; Larsson 1987:395; and Schneider, G. 1982:243.

⁴⁵⁴ Sandnes points out that to interpret this speech as interrupted, would be to underestimate

2. οἱ μὲν ... οἱ δε

The grammatical structure οἱ μὲν ... οἱ δε "usually assigns opposite reactions or circumstances (1:5; 11:16; 23:8; 28:24. Cf. 2:12-13)"⁴⁵⁵ A natural reading of this verse, then, implies that v. 32a describes the negative reaction, whereas v. 32b describes the positive reaction to Paul's speech. It has been suggested that (some of) the Epicureans were negative whereas (some of) the Stoics were positive.⁴⁵⁶ This seems improbable, though, since a) Paul had found areas of agreement with both Stoics and Epicureans (see 3.4.4.3), and b) both schools denied the resurrection of the body (see next textual comment).⁴⁵⁷

3. ἐχλεύαζον

χλεύαζω means to 'mock', 'jeer', 'sneer' or 'make fun of'. (This verb is *hapax legomena* in NT, but the compound διαχλεύαζω occurs in 2:13). This negative reaction towards the resurrection should be seen in the wider context in Acts, where scepticism towards the Resurrection is a recurring theme (cf. the Sadducees, e.g. in 4:2, and Festus in 26:24). The focus here in the Athenian context is on Greek thinking, where ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν

Luke's "role in the final redaction of this text" (Sandnes 1993:19).

⁴⁵⁵ Sandnes 1993:18. See also Barrett 1974:71; Marshall 1980:291; and Weiser 1985:477.

⁴⁵⁶ See Haenchen 1977:506; Schneider, G. 1982:243; Neyrey 1990; Bartchy 1995:304-305; and Croy 1997. The plausibility of this view is also argued for in Croy 2000:326.

⁴⁵⁷ Croy also admits this: "As far as we know, no Stoic ever entertained the notion of the resurrection *of the body*." He adds, though, that this is "reconcilable with Luke's narrative, for he portrays the more sympathetic members of the crowd only as curious and perplexed, not as wholeheartedly in agreement with Paul." (Croy 1997:37-38) This seems, however, to be an inadequate understanding of the contrast in 17:32. It seems better, therefore, to remain 'agnostic' about the nature of the two groups described in this verse.

probably was understood as "the standing up of corpses"⁴⁵⁸ and thus seen as "too materialistic for their spiritualized thinking".⁴⁵⁹ Keener gives a succinct summary of Greek thinking on the afterlife and the resurrection:

"Among major schools of Greek thought, only Epicureans denied the soul's immortality: they believed that the soul was material, like the body, and died with it. Most Greeks believed in a shadowy afterlife in the underworld (perhaps similar to the Old Testament *rephaim*), sometimes coupled with reincarnation (as in Plato); under Plato's influence some Greeks sought to free the immortal soul from worldly existence so it could escape back to the pure heavens from which it was created. Stoics believed that the soul lived on after death (although, like everything else, it was eventually absorbed back into God), but like other Greeks they could not conceive of a resurrection of the body."⁴⁶⁰

This sceptical attitude towards the resurrection was also connected directly to the history of the Areopagus Council. According to Aeschylus, the god Apollos was reported as saying the following at the foundation - or inauguration - of the Areopagus Council by the city's patron goddess Athene: "Once a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection (ἀνάστασις)." (*Eumen.* 647f.)⁴⁶¹ On the basis of such premises, a mocking attitude to the Christian Gospel of 'Jesus and the Resurrection' seems natural.

4. ... Ἀκουσόμεθά σου περὶ τούτου καὶ πάλιν

Some Athenians expressed their interest in more information about Paul's message, as in the words of NIV; "We want to hear you again on this subject." This should not be

⁴⁵⁸ Brown 1986:303.

⁴⁵⁹ Coenen & Brown 1986:277.

⁴⁶⁰ Keener 1993:374.

⁴⁶¹ See e.g. Hemer 1989a:118; Bruce 1990a:387; Winter 1996:85; and Witherington 1998:532.

understood as a polite dismissal ("enough for now, perhaps another time"⁴⁶²), but as a serious request in the light of the οἱ μὲν ... οἱ δὲ structure. It seems (as Marshall suggests) that "these people longed that what Paul said was true"⁴⁶³.

Critical comments:

Luke starts his concluding comments by focusing on the dual Athenian reaction to Paul's speech. Some mocked and some were seriously interested. In Athens, then, as elsewhere, the resurrection of Jesus was both:

"... a point of fascination and a point of disruption. It promises new life and hope, but also implies the utter particularity of the Christian gospel: God has only ever raised one person from corruption to incorruption on this earth. The uniqueness of the message is that the transformation of all things, signalled for the end of time, has in principle already happened."⁴⁶⁴

This dual reaction of scorn and interest indicates that Paul had hit some deep-seated targets in the audience. The Athenians were challenged at the basic worldview level and that produced both annoyance and longing. The latter (positive) reaction was, of course, what Paul had been aiming at, i.e. promoting curiosity and eliciting questions among his listeners (see 3.5.1.4).

⁴⁶² Witherington 1998:532. See also Bruce 1988:343; Krodel 1986:339; and Longenecker 1981:478.

⁴⁶³ Marshall 1980:291.

⁴⁶⁴ Kirk 1992:153.

4.5.2 Paul leaving the Areopagus Council, 17:33

17.33 οὕτως ὁ Παῦλος ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν

Textual comments:

1. οὕτως

οὕτως refers to v. 32 and should be translated as 'at that' or 'under these circumstances'.

2. ὁ Παῦλος ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν

The verb ἐξέρχομαι ('go out' or 'come out') should be seen as a contrast to

επιλαμβανομαι in v. 19a, whereas ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν ('from their midst', i.e. from the Council) functions as an opposite to ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου Πάγου in v. 22a.

Critical comments:

This short verse, which is formed by Luke as a clear contrast to v. 19a and v. 22a, concludes the actual Areopagus scene (vv. 19-33). Luke simply states the fact: After having finished his speech and when encountered with the dual reaction of scorn and interest, Paul left the meeting of the Areopagus Council. As Schneider observes;

"Natürlich will der Erzähler mit dieser Angabe nicht der Methode des Paulus kritisieren. Er möchte vielmehr Kritik an den athenischen Hörern

üben. Bei der "Griechen"-Mission ist das Auferstehungskerygma der Christen das grösste Hindernis."⁴⁶⁵

Thus, in vv. 32a and 33, Luke underlines that many in the Athenian audience failed to make use of the appropriate time to respond positively to Paul's speech. On the other hand, there was also real interest (v. 32b) as well as genuine faith (see below on v. 34) among some of the Athenians.

4.5.3 *The positive results of Paul's speech, 17:34*⁴⁶⁶

17.34 τινὲς δὲ ἄνδρες κολληθέντες αὐτῷ ἐπίστευσαν, ἐν οἷς καὶ Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης καὶ γυνὴ ὀνόματι Δάμαρις καὶ ἕτεροι σὺν αὐτοῖς.

Textual comments:

1. τινὲς δὲ ἄνδρες κολληθέντες αὐτῷ ἐπίστευσαν

Certain (τινὲς δε) men (ἄνδρες) became followers (κολλάομαι means to 'join'; here: 'join a person', 'become a follower/disciple of someone', BAGD 2.b.α) of Paul. The use of πιστεύω (to 'believe (in)', 'have faith (in)', with God or Christ as object) is significant and points to the fact that there were genuine conversions following Paul's Areopagus speech.

⁴⁶⁵ Schneider, G. 1982:244.

⁴⁶⁶ Gill suggests that Dionysios and Damaris are literary conventions by Luke (Gill, D. 1999). This seems highly unlikely, however, in view of a) Luke's credibility as a historian (as argued in 2.3 and 3.3), b) the lack of any theological reasons for the inclusion of the two names (see Hemer 1989a:206-209), and c) the plausible reasons for their presence (see the exegetical comments below).

This expression, then, means that some "who had joined Paul came to faith"⁴⁶⁷. These were probably the first Christian converts in Achaia. The reference in 1 Cor. 16:15 to the household of Stephanas (in Corinth) as "the firstfruits of Achaia" might, as Witherington suggests, imply that "his house, through the conversion of the family, became the first Christian household and locus for a house church in Achaia".⁴⁶⁸

2. ἐν οἷς καὶ Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης

Bruce observes that there "is no need to include καὶ γυναῖκα in ἐν οἷς, since οἷς is definitely masculine, having ἄνδρες as its antecedent"⁴⁶⁹. The first name mentioned among the converts is Dionysius ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης. The use of this title (which is the correct one for a member of the Council⁴⁷⁰) indicates "one of the few examples of élite contact"⁴⁷¹ in Acts. This confirms that Paul's audience contained members of the Areopagus Council (see the comments to vv. 19 and 22, as well as 3.4.2.3). Nothing more certain is known about Dionysios, so the suggestion made by Eusebius (in *Hist. Eccl.* 3.4.11; 4.23.3) that Dionysios was the first bishop of Athens seems to be quite speculative.

3. καὶ γυναῖκα ὀνόματι Δάμαρις

The second convert Luke mentions is "a woman named Damaris" (NIV). There were no female members of the Areopagus Council, so she must either have belonged to "a crowd

⁴⁶⁷ Seebass 1986:349.

⁴⁶⁸ Witherington 1998:533.

⁴⁶⁹ Bruce 1990a:387.

⁴⁷⁰ See Hemer 1989a:119 and 3.3.2.1.

of bystanders listening to whatever they found interesting"⁴⁷² or have served as an educated "companion of a citizen of Athens at public occasions where the presence of highborn Athenian women was frowned upon"⁴⁷³. The identity of Damaris remains a matter of speculation. It seems highly improbable, however, that she was the wife of Dionysios (as Chrysostom suggested⁴⁷⁴), but she might very well have been a prominent foreign woman (see v. 21), possibly of Egyptian descent.⁴⁷⁵

4. καὶ ἕτεροι σὺν αὐτοῖς

This expression ('and others with them') indicates that 'a number of others' (NIV), in addition to the two persons mentioned, were converted. It could refer to "members of the households of Dionysius and Damaris which in the case of the former possibly included clients who accompanied their patron in public"⁴⁷⁶.

Critical comments:

There is no clear indication in the Lucan account of how long the interval was between v. 33 and v. 34. The account seems to allow for the possibility of further Pauline instruction

⁴⁷¹ Gill, D.W. 1994c:110.

⁴⁷² Bruce 1988:343.

⁴⁷³ Witherington 1998:533.

⁴⁷⁴ See e.g. Bruce 1990a:388.

⁴⁷⁵ This is suggested in Griffiths, J. 1964. See Hemer 1989a:232 for the ancient evidence for the name Damaris.

⁴⁷⁶ Winter 1996:86. The presence of ἕτεροι σὺν αὐτοῖς could be explained, as Winter plausibly suggests, on the basis of the traditional role played by the people of Athens in the conventions surrounding a herald's official introduction of foreign deities into the Athenian Pantheon. (See Winter 1996:78-79,87.)

for those who wished that (v. 32b). Verse 34 should in any case be understood as describing the positive results of Paul's speech in vv. 22b-31. "In spite of the proverbial attitude of Athenian audiences, Luke wished his readers to note that there were converts, apart from an Areopagite, as a result of the speech."⁴⁷⁷ Carson ably summarizes the results in vv. 32-34:

"Acts 17 does not say that "only a few" believed, but that certain people (*tines de*) believed, including a member of the Areopagus and a (probably distinguished) woman along with some others (*heteroi*). For the rest, some (*hoi men*) mocked, and some (*hoi de*) declared they wanted to hear Paul again on these matters. Comparison with the language depicting results from others' sermons in Acts betrays no fundamental shift."⁴⁷⁸

The Lucan epilogue thus indicates the theological adequacy of Paul's approach and message in Athens. Despite the significant results, however, there is no mentioning of baptism or actual church planting in Athens, neither in the Lucan account nor elsewhere in the New Testament.

4.6 Conclusions

This chapter has presented a detailed exegetical study of the Greek text of Acts 17:16-34. This has been done with a dual intention: a) to substantiate the preliminary analysis in chapter 2 and the critical conclusions on the contemporary exegetical debate in chapter 3; and b) to provide a sufficient exegetical basis for the analysis and assessment in chapter 5

⁴⁷⁷ Winter 1996:87.

⁴⁷⁸ Carson 1996b:503. See also 6.2.2.2 and Green, J. 1998:102. Contrary to this view, quite a few commentators would mistakenly point to the "scanty" response in Athens (e.g. Bruce

of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model ‘then’. This chapter's exegetical study leads naturally to some plausible conclusions to the two sub-questions identified in 1.5.1.

4.6.1 *An apologetic model intended by Luke?*

The first research sub-question focused on *whether Luke, as the narrator, intended to provide his readers (i.e. the narratees) with an apologetic model in Acts 17:16-34 by recording what Paul supposedly did in Athens* (cf. 1.5.1). It seems plausible to assume – in the light of the preceding discussion in chapters 2, 3 and 4 – that Luke had *at least three intentions* with his account of Paul’s visit to Athens⁴⁷⁹: a) to give the narratees a credible account of the initial event in Athens, b) to confirm the validity of the narratees’ belief in the truth of the Christian Gospel over against pagan alternatives, and c) to give the narratees significant apologetic tools for reaching out to pagans.

4.6.1.1 *Luke’s intention (1): Providing a credible account*

For the reasons given in chapter 3 (see 3.3 and 3.6.1), this chapter has presupposed the basic historical authenticity of Acts 17:16-34. The pericope, which clearly seems to play a key role in Luke’s overall account, provides the narratees with an edited and highly condensed version of a genuine Pauline speech in Athens before the Areopagus Council, within a narrative framework.

1988:344; Larsson 1987:396; Longenecker 1981:478). See further discussion in 5.3.2.

⁴⁷⁹ This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that Luke may have had other reasons for recording this passage (see 2.3.1). See also the conclusion in Gärtner 1955:64.

The exegetical discussion above has shown the legitimacy of understanding the Lucan account as a description of Paul's role as a herald of 'foreign gods' before the Areopagus Council (probably situated in the *Stoa Basileios*). This is clearly no formal, adversarial trial session, but the context described is a preliminary meeting of the Council. The preceding exegetical analysis has also shown that Paul's speech – as a deliberative speech before the Council on the topic of the 'foreign gods' of 'Jesus and the Resurrection' – naturally falls into five parts: 1) The *exordium*, 17:22b-23, where Paul establishes contact with the Athenian audience by referring to their altar 'To an unknown god'; 2) The *probatio I*, 17:24-25, where Paul presents the personal God as the Creator, Sustainer and Lord of the universe; 3) The *probatio II*, 17:26-27, where Paul introduces humanity's inhabitation of the earth and seeking of God as God's double intention for all of humanity; 4) The *probatio III*, 17:28-29, where Paul challenges idolatry on the basis of humanity as God's offspring; 5) The *peroratio*, 17:30-31, where Paul emphasizes conversion in view of the final judgment and finally returns to the initial topic raised in the *agora* context, 'Jesus and the Resurrection'.

4.6.1.2 Luke's intention (2): Providing confirmation for Christians

It was suggested in chapter 2 that Luke recorded this event, not just to provide a credible account of a historical Pauline visit to Athens, but also to provide his Christian readers with confirmation of the truth and validity of the Christian faith over against pagan alternatives (see 2.3.2). The discussions in chapters 3 and 4 have shown the plausibility of this view.

It seems plausible to assume that Christian converts among the readers of the Book of Acts were influenced by significant challenges from pagan philosophy and religion. They would thus need confirmation about the credibility and validity of Christian beliefs in 'one God and one Lord'. *This passage, then, presents Luke's implicit arguments for the validity of remaining a Christian on the basis of essential Christian truth claims, even when faced with pagan philosophy and religion in Athens, the cultural capital of the Hellenistic world.* The truth-value of the beliefs of the Christian narratees is thus confirmed.

4.6.1.3 Luke's intention (3): Providing tools for apologetics to pagans

It was suggested in chapter 2 that Acts 17:16-34 fits a positive, repeated pattern of apologetics in Acts and can be related to Luke's intention to provide his Christian readers with apologetic tools for reaching out to pagans. Such an understanding of Acts 17:16-34 has been shown to be consistent with contemporary scholarship (as argued in chapter 3) and supported by a responsible exegesis of the passage itself (as argued in this chapter). *The implicit claim in the Lucan narrative is that Paul's approach in Acts 17:16-34 is representative for the way the apostles sought to justify the truth claims of the Christian Gospel to their pagan contemporaries.*

When analysing Paul's speech in Athens and the parallel passages in Acts 14:15-17 and 1 Thess. 1:9-10, three main elements seem to emerge as typical of the apostolic apologetic

in a non-Jewish setting:⁴⁸⁰ a) The strong affirmation of creational and providential monotheism, implicitly on the basis of Judeo-Christian convictions, but explicitly on the basis of general revelation. The one, true God is the personal Creator of the universe and is close to all humanity. b) The unequivocal affirmation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, on the basis of the facticity of the resurrection, which vindicated his final authority as the universal Judge. The apostolic message could thus appropriately be summarized as ‘Jesus and the Resurrection’. c) The strong emphasis on the responsibility of humanity to repent from the falsity and futility of idolatry to an acknowledgement of God as the one, true God and Jesus Christ as the one, true Lord. The possibility of repentance now, before the final judgment, is due to God's mercy.

All this implies that Luke seems to have recorded this event as a classic and paradigmatic example of Christian apologetics in a pluralistic and pagan setting. It remains, however, to analyse and assess this Lucan model (cf. chapter 5).

4.6.2 An apologetic model rooted in Paul's apologetic?

The second research sub-question focused on *whether Acts 17:16-34 provides valid insights into the apologetic thinking and practice of the apostle Paul* (see 1.5.1). The preceding discussion – in 3.3 and chapter 4 – leads to the conclusion that the Lucan account should be seen as giving *a reliable picture of the apostle Paul as apologist in*

⁴⁸⁰ See 2.2.4 and 3.3.3.1. See also e.g. Hanssen 1995:13.

Athens, both explicitly about his apologetic practice and implicitly about his apologetic thinking.

4.6.2.1 Paul's apologetic practice in Athens

Luke's account in Acts 17:16-34 covers a significant, but brief, visit by Paul to Athens, where the focus is on apologetic challenges and responses in the pluralistic context of the *agora*, especially when facing the Areopagus Council. Paul uses this informal session to present an *apologia* for essential Christian truth claims.

The introduction in vv. 16-21 sets the appropriate and authentic scene for Paul's speech (vv. 22b-31), whereas the epilogue (vv. 32-34) describes the expected (v. 32) as well as the unexpected (v. 34) results of the speech. At the level of orator and oratees, the Areopagus Speech should be seen as an attempt to clarify misunderstandings and to justify the truth claims of the Christian Gospel over against relevant Athenian questions, objections and alternatives. Paul's deliberative speech seems to have functioned – at least implicitly - as an apologetic dialogue directed to Athenian idolaters, Stoics and Epicureans respectively (see also 3.4.4.3). The preceeding exegetical discussion has shown that Paul, when relating to these diverse religious and philosophical groups in Athens, *moves from 'points of continuity and contact' to 'points of discontinuity and tension'* in his argument.

The altar 'To an unknown god' is significant for Paul's argument and constitutes the basis for *two interrelated, but distinct, lines of argument*. First, the implicit admission of ignorance about the Deity naturally leads to a presentation of the nature of the one, true

God. Paul's emphasis is both on the transcendence and the immanence of God, simultaneously challenging popular idolatry, Stoic pantheism and Epicurean deism. The times of ignorance are past, and humanity now stands responsible before this one, true God. The apostolic Gospel on 'Jesus and the Resurrection' must be understood within this biblical framework.

Secondly, the Athenian attempt to avoid divine judgment is futile. It is impossible to escape from God, since humanity is his offspring and totally dependent on Him. The delaying of God's judgment is due to His mercy and not to the Athenians' intended safety precautions. The finality of God's judgment is vindicated through 'Jesus and the Resurrection'. Paul therefore challenges the Athenians, who (along with all of humanity) were created to seek God, to change their ways of thinking and living in light of this.

Paul's apologetic practice in Athens will be analysed and assessed at large in the following chapter.

4.6.2.2 Paul's apologetic thinking in Athens

The preceding chapters provide a basis for some significant *conclusions* on Paul's apologetic thinking in Athens. *First*, subsequent chapters have confirmed the preliminary observations in 2.4 about a) significant underlying theological convictions in Paul's apologetics, b) Paul's awareness of the need for a proper contextual understanding in apologetics, and c) Paul's argumentative structure from creation to Resurrection and 'the epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith. *Secondly*, chapters 3 and 4 have also uncovered

Paul's subtle apologetic dialogue with Stoicism and Epicureanism, where he seems to treat them as inadequate 'half-truths'. *Thirdly*, both the clear apologetic character of Acts 17:16-34 and its key role in the Lucan account seem to indicate that Paul considered the rational justification of Christian truth claims – through critical arguments, logical persuasion and the marshalling of relevant evidence – not only legitimate but also essential in his witness to pagans.

The apologetic thinking of Paul in Athens, which includes these significant examples, will be analysed and assessed at large in the following chapter.

5. ANALYSING AND ASSESSING ACTS 17:16-34 AS AN APOLOGETIC MODEL ‘THEN’

Outline:

5.1 Introducing the Chapter

5.2 Analysing Paul's Apologetic in Athens: Contexts and Features

5.3 Assessing Paul's Apologetic in Athens: Genuine, Effective and Relevant?

5.4 Conclusions

5.1 Introducing the Chapter

5.1.1 The aim and focus of this chapter

Building on the preliminary analysis of the context of Acts in chapter 2, the critical engagement with commentators in chapter 3, and the critical exposition of the actual text in chapter 4, *this chapter* analyses and assesses Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model ‘then’. This is done in three parts, after an introductory section on the apologetic character and argument of Acts 17:16-34 (5.1.2-3). *First*, in order properly to understand Paul in his original context, an analysis is provided of Paul's apologetic in Athens in terms of major contexts and significant features (5.2). *Secondly*, Paul’s original apologetic encounter in Athens is assessed in terms of whether it should be seen as genuine, effective and relevant

apologetics (5.3). *Thirdly*, in the concluding section (5.4), on the basis of the preceding analysis and assessment, a substantial answer is given to the first major research question, i.e. whether Acts 17:16-34 contains an identifiable and positive apologetic model, and, if so, what its significant elements are and its status may be (see 1.5.1).

5.1.2 Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic text

This chapter presents an analysis and assessment of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics. A number of significant observations by contemporary scholars clearly strengthen the case for considering this passage as a significant apologetic text.

First, Hemer's term 'apologetic dialogue' was shown in 3.4.4.3 to be an illuminating way of looking at Paul's polemical engagement with the Athenian audience.

Secondly, Winter's plausible suggestion that Paul might have used a Stoic apologetic outline (see 3.4.4.3) indicates that the speech should be seen as an highly sophisticated one, showing Paul as a Judeo-Christian apologist among pagan apologists.

Thirdly, Gempf's plausible description of the Areopagus Speech, - as a follow-up talk intended to clarify misunderstandings (3.5.2.2) - clearly fits the definition of apologetics assumed in 1.2.2.

Fourthly, following Gärtner's plausible suggestion (see 3.2.1), it has been argued by many commentators that the apostle Paul seems to have appropriated key motifs as well as the

general approach from Jewish Hellenistic apologetics (such as Wis. 13-15).⁴⁸¹ This approach "clothed essentially Jewish beliefs in a Hellenistic form"⁴⁸² in order to establish what could be seen as legitimate points of contact.

Fifthly, as Bruce (among others) has pointed out (see 2.3.2), the speeches at Lystra and Athens "anticipate the main line of second-century Christian apologetic against the pagans".⁴⁸³ This implies that Justin Martyr and other early significant apologists seem to have treated the Areopagus Speech as an apologetic model.

Sixthly, in a parallel argument to Guerra's interpretation of Romans, it can be argued that this Lucan account of Paul as an apologist in Athens seems to be an important bridge historically between the apologetics of Hellenistic Judaism and the Christian Greek

⁴⁸¹ See Gärtner 1955:34,66-72,125-129,167-169,251-252. Gärtner pointed out that there is "a close relationship between this portion of Wisdom of Solomon and Acts 17 in respect of their theology. The reference to nature has the same function, namely, to reinforce an attack on a false conception of God and a forceful polemic against idolatry." (Gärtner 1955:251) See also the critical analysis of Jewish Hellenistic apologetics to the Hellenistic Roman world in Conzelmann 1992:135-233, as well as the brief discussion in Barnett 2000:268-271.

⁴⁸² Marshall 1980:282. See also e.g. Witherington 1998:524,531.

⁴⁸³ Bruce 1977:35. On the influence of Acts 17:16-34 on Justin Martyr's apologetic (both in his Logos-argument and in his description of Socrates), see Skarsaune 1996 and Skarsaune 1998. Hemer issues a timely warning when treating the Areopagus Speech as having a special kinship with the second century apologists: "It is indeed a model of apologetic, but its force as apologetic is rooted in its situation, and partly lost in the necessity of summarising a recollection. It presupposes a real encounter, not a Lucan set-piece, which must have focused more pointedly on the latent arguments. This is Pauline apologetic in substance. It is neither Luke nor a proto-Justin." (Hemer 1989b:255; Hemer's original reads 'Lukan'.)

apologists of the second century.⁴⁸⁴ In that case, Acts 17:16-34 should be treated as a key part of a significant Judeo-Christian apologetic tradition.

These arguments confirm the exegetical conclusions in 4.6 about Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic text. *This chapter, then, assumes that 'Paul as apologist' is an exegetically valid perspective on this Lucan text.*

5.1.3 Recapitulating Paul's argument

The previous chapter established the following exegetical understanding of Paul's argument in the Areopagus Speech:

The exordium: Introducing the topic(s)

17:22b Vocative address.

17:22c The *captatio benevolentiae*: The religiosity of the Athenians.

17:23a The *narratio*: Paul's tour of Athens and the altar.

17:23b The *propositio*: Paul's aim is making known the Unknown God.

Probatio I: On the nature of God

17:24a Premise (for v. 24b): God is sovereign Creator and Lord.

17:24b First critique: Therefore, he does not live in temples.

17:25a Second critique: God does not need humanity's service/sacrifices.

17:25b Premise (for v. 25a): God is totally independent as the source of life.

Probatio II: On the divine intentions with humanity

⁴⁸⁴ See Guerra 1995. Alexander also recognizes this when she argues that Paul's speech "is a fine example of philosophical rather than judicial argument, showing continuity both with the Hellenistic-Jewish tradition of philosophical debate with paganism and with the later Christian apologists" (Alexander 1999:33).

- 17:26a God created humanity as a unity.
- 17:26b God's first intention with humanity: to fill/cover the earth.
- 17:26c God is supplying order and stability in the order of creation.
- 17:27a God's prime intention with humanity: to seek God.
- 17:27b Premise (for v. 27a): God is near (but humanity is blind).

Probatio III: On the nature of humanity

- 17:28a A common triadic formula: Human existence in God.
- 17:28b Proof (quotation): Humanity is God's offspring.
- 17:29a Premise: Humanity is God's offspring (repeated).
- 17:29b Consequence: The Sovereign Deity is not like idols.

Peroratio: Challenging to response(s)

- 17:30a Past status: God has overlooked times of ignorance.
- 17:30b Present status: God commands all to repent.
- 17:31a Reason: God has set a day for judgment and appointed a Judge.
- 17:31b Evidence: God has raised the Judge from the dead.

This is the exegetical basis for this chapter's analysis and assessment of Paul's apologetic approach before the Areopagus Council.

5.2 Analysing Paul's Apologetic in Athens: Contexts and Features⁴⁸⁵

5.2.1 Paul's apologetic in Athens: Three major contexts

It is possible to identify three major settings in Luke's account of Paul's apologetic approach in Athens, i.e. the synagogue context and the informal and formal contexts of the *agora*. These settings or contexts should be distinguished from each other both in terms of

⁴⁸⁵ The aim of this analytical overview of Paul's apologetic in Athens is a) to show the validity of the preliminary analysis offered in 2.2 on the basis of the exegetical discussion in chapters 3 and 4, and b) to provide a basis for the subsequent discussion in this chapter.

apologetic challenges and responses. Paul seems to have used different justification procedures relative to these different contexts in Athens.⁴⁸⁶

5.2.1.1 *The synagogue setting*

Paul's visits to a synagogue in Athens (17:17a) are clearly not the focus of Luke's narrative, but still remain a clear feature of this passage. There might have been a dual reason for Paul's visit: *First*, Paul's obligation to go to the Jews first, and *secondly*, possibly also the fact that the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks were those most likely "to oppose the idolatry rampant in their city".⁴⁸⁷

It seems reasonable to assume (as indicated in 4.3.2, see comments to 17:17) *that Paul's approach in the Athenian synagogue resembled his approach in other synagogues.*⁴⁸⁸ In the synagogue setting, truth was established by an appeal to the (Jewish) Scriptures (i.e. the shared religious authority). The apostolic apologetic in this setting followed this standard justification procedure and was therefore based on the OT. It was thus argued (διαλέγομαι), for audiences consisting of "Jews and God-fearing Greeks" (17:17a), that "this Jesus...is the Christ" (see 17:3), the promised Messiah. The structure of this argument from Scripture and history in the 'synagogue setting' – anywhere, and by

⁴⁸⁶ Potter observes that Paul's engagement with the cultured despisers of the faith often is accentuated. "But a careful look at that passage indicates that Paul addressed himself to three different publics: the religious community (that is to say, to the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks - those persons who were already conversant with Jewish religion and morality). the marketplace or the public sphere (whoever happened to come by) and then, last, the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (those who participated in what social theorist Alvin Gouldner has referred to as 'the culture of critical discourse')." (Potter 1995:178) This analysis of the 'three publics', however, seems imprecise – both in its use of 'religious community' instead of e.g. 'Scripture community' and in its exclusion of the Epicureans and the Stoics from the open marketplace setting – and does not correspond to the three contexts described in the following.

⁴⁸⁷ Richardson, D. 1984:19.

⁴⁸⁸ See e.g. 13:14ff and 17:1-4. For a description of the apologetic to Jews, see 2.2.3-4.

implication also in Athens – is a move from the written special revelation (i.e. the OT) to the facticity, meaning, and significance of Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah.

5.2.1.2 *The open discussions in the marketplace*

Luke's narrative moves swiftly from the Athenian synagogue to the *agora* (17:17b-18). This setting is clearly at the centre of Luke's interest when describing Paul's visit to Athens. The apostle's outreach in the *agora* should be seen in the light of Paul's calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. This 'marketplace' setting was a pluralistic context with a plethora of competing religious and philosophical truth claims. There was no common recognized authority to appeal to, so truth had to be argued by seeking to establish some common ground with the audience. The Lucan narrative underlines some significant features regarding this apologetic setting.

1. Paul encountered a variety of people in the *agora* (17:17b-18): casual passers-by, regular visitors, as well as Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. This variety in background was typical of the Athenian pluralistic context (see 3.3.2.1).
2. Paul had to justify the belief in the Christian Gospel over against Athenian questions, objections, and alternatives. Paul's initial preaching of "the good news of Jesus and the Resurrection" in the *agora* seems to have sounded foolish ("a babbler"), foreign ("foreign gods"), and confusing (a new divine couple?) to the Athenians (17:18). The challenges thrown up by the alternative beliefs of popular paganism, Epicureanism and Stoicism also had to be met.
3. Paul responded to the *agora* context by a continuing dialogue (and dispute) with the Athenians. As shown in 2.2.3, the dialogues with non-Christians play a significant role in apostolic apologetic, as recorded in Acts.
4. The description of the open *agora* setting provides the context and background for the subsequent narrative with its major focus on the Areopagus setting. The scene is set for what seems to be a significant Pauline apologetic in a non-Jewish setting.

5.2.1.3 The formal setting before the Areopagus

Whereas the open discussions in the *agora* setting seems to have been a *regular, informal context* for Paul while visiting Athens, the setting before the Areopagus in the *agora* (17:19-33) is described as a *specific, more formal occasion*. As previous chapters have shown,⁴⁸⁹ Paul is clearly not answering to formal charges in an adversary trial before the Areopagus Council, but given an opportunity to give his speech as a herald of 'foreign gods'. The speech conforms to these Athenian conventions (concerning the introduction of 'foreign gods'), but is simultaneously an attempt to justify the truth claims of the Christian Gospel over and against relevant Athenian questions, objections and alternatives. Thus, Paul's Areopagus Speech corresponds to the definition of apologetics assumed in 1.2.2. The Lucan narrative underlines some significant features regarding this apologetic setting.

1. Luke makes the transition from the open *agora* setting to the more formal Areopagus setting⁴⁹⁰ by focusing on the curiosity of the Athenians (17:19-21). Paul's initial preaching in Athens had centred on 'Jesus and the Resurrection'. To the Athenians, the Hebrew name Jesus must have excited curiosity because of the staggering claims made about a strange and unfamiliar Jew. The resurrection as a concept would also have excited curiosity to such a Greek audience. This emphasis on curiosity complements the picture given in the previous verses, and implies that Paul faced a mixed audience characterized both by curiosity and scepticism in relation to him and the Christian Gospel.
2. There is a significant interplay in Luke's *agora* narrative between the open discussions in the marketplace and the formal discourse before the Areopagus. In the first context, the emphasis is on the apologetic challenges, whereas – in the latter context – the focus is on Paul's response to these challenges. Luke's summary of Paul's speech before the Areopagus could actually be read as an implicit apologetic dialogue dealing specifically with these challenges (see 3.4.4.3).
3. Compared with the apostolic apologetic in the synagogue setting, the Areopagus speech

⁴⁸⁹ See 3.4.2 and 4.3.4.

⁴⁹⁰ As argued in 3.4.1 and 4.3.4, this transition does not necessarily imply a physical location outside the *agora*.

indicates a different approach all together.⁴⁹¹ In this pagan context, no OT passage is quoted or referred to explicitly. The Lucan narrative depicts Paul as consciously using his knowledge of the religious and cultural background of Athens in order to establish vital points of contact. Paul seeks to establish common ground with his audience, on the basis of God's self-revelation through creation and history. The apostle focused on God as Creator, Sustainer and Judge over and against questions and objections regarding the divine nature and 'Jesus and the Resurrection'. To challenge the audience of idolatry (on the basis both of whom God really is and of his future judgment) seems essential to this approach. Furthermore, the historicity of the Resurrection and its implications for the credibility of Jesus are emphasized. The structure of Paul's argument in the Areopagus setting, then, seems to move *from* natural theology and God's general revelation *via* the ultimate authority and future judgment of God *to* the facticity, meaning and significance of the Resurrection.⁴⁹²

5.2.2 Paul's apologetic in Athens: Three significant features

Three central features can be identified in Paul's apologetic in Athens: a) Through 'points of continuity and contact', Paul seeks to find common ground with his audience; b) The normative content of Paul's message is a presentation and justification of Christian truth claims; c) Through 'points of discontinuity and tension', Paul challenges the audience in terms of their beliefs.

The exegesis in chapter 4 has indicated that it seems possible to demonstrate these features in all three settings in Athens. In terms of the synagogue setting and the open *agora* setting, however, these characteristics are more implicit in Luke's narrative. The following discussion, therefore, will focus on the more formal *agora* setting, i.e. on the Areopagus Speech.

⁴⁹¹ As noted in 2.2.3 and 3.5.1, the speech in Lystra is the nearest parallel in Acts (see Acts 14:15ff).

⁴⁹² This approach seems to a certain extent to be paralleled in 1 Thess. 1:9-10, Rom. 1:18ff and Rom. 2:14-16. See previous discussion in chapter 3.3.3.

5.2.2.1 'Points of continuity and contact': Finding common ground

Paul identified and utilized crucial 'points of continuity and contact' in the Athenian context in order to seek to establish some common ground with his listeners.

1. The curiosity of the Athenians (17:19-21; cf. 5.2.1.3) constituted the rhetorical starting-point for Paul. Their wish for more knowledge about these new religious claims gave Paul the opportunity to expound his teaching of the Christian Gospel before the prestigious Areopagus Council. Paul argued thus before the Council for 'the epistemic permission' of essential Christian truth claims.

2. In the *exordium*, Paul refers to a specific Athenian altar ('To an unknown god', 17:23; cf. 3.4.3.2). The apostle understood this altar as an open acknowledgement of ignorance, which clearly is a crucial element in Luke's narrative (see 17:20a, 23, 30). The altar quotation provided the apostle with a 'theological' starting-point for his speech. Their self-confessed ignorance made it legitimate to present who God really is. 'Safety precaution', i.e. the desire to avoid divine catastrophe or judgment, is yet another aspect to this altar which was used by Paul in his argument for the inevitability of divine judgment (see 17:29-31). Paul's use of this pagan inscription (as 'proof') seems to some extent to parallel his use of OT 'proof texts' in the synagogue setting (see also next paragraph).

3. In his presentation to the Athenians, Paul used Stoic expressions and referred to Stoic beliefs as 'points of continuity and contact'. As shown in 3.4.4.3, this included the possible use of a Stoic apologetic outline, the Stoic view of divine providence, the quotation from

the Stoic poet Aratus (17:28), and the Stoic belief in judgment. As in the case of the altar inscription (see the previous paragraph), the reference to Aratus seems to a certain extent to parallel his use of the OT Scriptures in the synagogue setting. Witherington remarks that, from a rhetorical point of view, "the function of the quotation or quotations [in v.28] is to cite an authority recognized by one's audience to support one's point. It would have done Paul no good to simply quote the Scriptures, a book the audience did not know and one that had no authority in the minds of these hearers."⁴⁹³

4. As shown in 3.4.4.3, Paul also seems to have used Epicurean expressions and referred to Epicurean beliefs in his speech. This included the following 'points of continuity and contact': God/the gods is/are living, knowable, and is/are not dependent on human temples or gifts. The latter emphasis on God's/divine self-existence ('aseity') is crucial in Paul's argument.

As indicated in chapters 3 and 4, some scholars would disagree with this interpretation, arguing that Paul sided with the Stoics against the Epicureans.⁴⁹⁴ A similar argument is set forth by *J. W. Montgomery* regarding Paul's apologetic approach: "Paul ignored the Epicureans ('the Sadducees of the Greeks'), doubtless because of the intellectual dishonesty into which their movement had fallen, and concentrated on the Stoics, who continued to

⁴⁹³ Witherington 1998:530.

⁴⁹⁴ See 3.4.4.3 and 4.5 (esp. the comments to 17:32).

hold a high view of natural law."⁴⁹⁵ *This argument, however, seems unbalanced and inadequate. First*, Paul did seem to have focused more explicitly on the Stoics, possibly for the reasons given by Montgomery above. This is especially evident from the crucial use of the Stoic poet Aratus, which could imply, as Montgomery argues, that Paul offered the Christian gospel to Stoic philosophers at Athens as "the historically verifiable fulfilment of natural religion and the natural law tradition, with their vague and insufficiently defined content"⁴⁹⁶. *Secondly*, however, as shown in previous chapters, Paul did not ignore the Epicureans. While, for Paul, areas of agreement may have been far greater in relation to the Stoics, the consensus described above in relation to Epicureanism still remains. *Thirdly*, as shown in the exegesis of the Lucan epilogue to the speech (see 4.5.1), there is no textual support for the interpretation that the Epicureans mocked whereas the Stoics were positive (17:32). *Fourthly* and most importantly, however, as argued in the exegesis of 17:25 (see 4.4.2), *a crucial part of Paul's apologetic strategy seems to have been to affirm both Stoic pantheism and Epicurean deism as equally inadequate 'half-truths', stressing divine immanence or divine transcendence at the expense of the other.*⁴⁹⁷

Paul used these significant references – to the curiosity, the altar, and to Stoic and Epicurean expressions and beliefs – as a basis for his presentation and justification of Christian truth claims before the Areopagus Council in Athens.

⁴⁹⁵ Montgomery 1996:244. Montgomery refers to E. M. Blaiklock for this view, in the unpublished "Annual Wheaton College Graduate School Lectures, October 21-22, 1964" (Montgomery 1978:37).

5.2.2.2 *Presenting and justifying Christian truth claims*

Luke's narrative indicates that Paul used the opportunity in Athens to deliver a presentation and justification of Christian truth claims, thereby providing contours of a Christian worldview. Paul sought to confirm these basic premises, negatively or positively, by the marshalling of evidence from the Athenians' experience as well as the historical evidence of the Christian Gospel.

In a classical study on apologetics, W. Smith claimed that the main points of Paul's apologetic argument in Athens were *creation, resurrection and judgment*: "The great truths which St. Paul set forth in this address are: the nature and character of God, the creation of the world by God, the resurrection of Christ, a judgment to come, and, because of these truths, the need for men to repent."⁴⁹⁸ An alternative analysis has recently been offered by D. Groothuis, where he introduced Paul's presentation and justification of Christian truth claims in Athens *as a number of propositions*:

"1. Athenian religion is objectively inadequate because it lacks Christ (vv. 22-23). 2. God is the Creator of all and cannot be reduced to idols. The Athenians' idolatrous worship is false before the fact of God (vv. 24-25). 3. God is the sovereign source of every human being and has marked out each one's habitation and place in history (v. 26). 4. God did this so that people would seek him and perhaps find him (v. 27). 5. A non-Christian Greek thinker's writings expand on point 4 (v. 28). 6. Since we are God's creatures, God should not be depicted by an image made by human skill (v. 29). It fits neither God nor us. 7. God overlooked the race's previous ignorance, but now commands all people everywhere to repent (v. 30). 8. God has decreed a day when the world will be rightly judged by the risen Christ (v. 31). 9. God has proven point 8 for all people by raising Christ from the dead in history (v. 31)."⁴⁹⁹

These analytical outlines must be assessed. The proposal from *Smith* – about creation, resurrection and judgment – seems consistent with the exegetical study in chapter 4 and

⁴⁹⁶ Montgomery 1996:223.

⁴⁹⁷ This argument will be further developed in 5.3 and is supported by Keyes' argument on "the near and far idols" of the Athenians (see 5.3.2.1). See also 3.4.4.3.

⁴⁹⁸ Smith 1981:269-270.

⁴⁹⁹ Groothuis 2000:178-179.

indicates key elements of the structure of Paul's argument (see 5.4.2.5). It seems more appropriate, however, in the light of this chapter, to rephrase and reorder the three elements as natural theology, ultimate authority and Resurrection. The outline offered by *Groothuis* highlights both the apologetic character of the speech and a number of truth claims in Paul's speech, but the significant 'points of continuity and contact' in Paul's argumentative strategy (as identified in 5.2.2.1) are clearly underemphasized.⁵⁰⁰ This means that this outline does not properly take into account the role of the altar (17:23) and the appeal to shared human experience (17:23-29) in the apostle's argument.

The following analysis focuses on the role of the doctrines of God, humanity, human responsibility, and 'Jesus and the Resurrection' in Paul's apologetic argument.

1. The focus of Paul's presentation in 17:23bff is clearly on the doctrine of God.⁵⁰¹ The apostle presents God as the Creator of the universe, and contrasts that with human-made temples (v. 24). Humanity's futile religious offerings are compared with God as the Sustainer of all life (v. 25). God is also the sovereign Ruler of creation, which is confirmed by humanity's living in him and seeking after him (vv. 26-28a). All this implies that the existence and nature of the one and true God is the basis for Paul's apologetic (see further 5.3.3.2).

2. Paul continues his apologetic argument with the doctrine of humanity.⁵⁰² Humanity is a unity (17:26a), is the object of God's providential care (17:26b-28a), and was intended to seek God (17:27). The Athenians' own writers (17:28) confirm the fact that humanity is

⁵⁰⁰ Similarly, Paul's 'positive deconstruction' of Athenian worldviews is not adequately focused on (see further 5.3.4.3).

⁵⁰¹ Liefeld notes that Paul develops a number of key aspects of the doctrine of God in 17:22-31: "1. God's creation of the world; 2. God's transcendence; 3. God as the source of human life; 4. God's sovereignty over human history and geography; 5. God's immanence; 6. God's noncorporeality; 7. God's forbearance; 8. God's righteous demands; 9. God's justice." (Liefeld 1995:69)

⁵⁰² G. McGrath notes perceptively "the logic of ... Paul's apologetic at Athens in Acts 17:25-29. A person's humanity (his or her personality, rationality and physical being) is the inescapable evidence of a dependent relationship. Before faith and repentance, there is alienation and rebellion, nonetheless a relationship exists." (McGrath, G. 1995a:133)

God's offspring. So, the one, true God of the Christian Gospel is no 'foreign' God.⁵⁰³ He is actually the Creator and Sustainer of the Athenians.

3. The final part of Paul's speech is concerned with human responsibility before God. In the light of being made in the image of a personal God (17:29), as well as the fact of the coming divine judgment (17:31), humanity should turn to the one, true God (17:30). The apostle's call to conversion, therefore, makes sense on the basis of the nature of God and humanity.

4. In the final sentence of his speech, Paul returns to the topic of his initial preaching in the marketplace: 'Jesus and the Resurrection' (17:18c, 31:b), but this time in a more indirect way. Jesus (introduced as a 'man') is the divinely appointed judge, and the evidence for this is said to be the historical resurrection of Jesus. As indicated in 2.2.3, the apostolic apologetic argument from history has as its focus the facticity, meaning, and significance of the Resurrection of Jesus. This crucial 'Resurrection argument' occurs both in relation to Jews and to Gentiles.⁵⁰⁴ The arguments from Scripture (in a Jewish setting) and from Creation (in a pagan setting) both seem to move - in parallel fashion - towards the facticity, meaning, and significance of the Resurrection. For Jewish audiences, the Resurrection functioned as an affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah (2:31ff; 13:30ff), whereas for Gentile audiences it functioned as a justification of Jesus as the Judge of the World (10:40,42:

⁵⁰³ Dowsett observes that "it's very interesting that Paul uses half his sermon to explain that there is nothing foreign to the Athenians about the Christian gospel ... It isn't a foreign religion. It is about a God who made them." (Dowsett 1994:185).

⁵⁰⁴ The only exception is the actual Lystra speech (14:15ff), though 14:6f points out that the

17:31).⁵⁰⁵ The Resurrection of Jesus is claimed to have vindicated central truth claims of the Christian Gospel. This implies an encouragement to curious Athenians to investigate the historical evidence for the Resurrection.⁵⁰⁶

5.2.2.3 *'Points of discontinuity and tension': Challenging beliefs*

Green has noted that Paul's speech to the Athenians could be summarized in "the three main points of a polemic against idolatry, a defence of the one true God, and the drawing of strong moral corollaries from man's relationship to him"⁵⁰⁷. These constitute clear points of tension, when encountering the Athenian situation, which was characterized by a plurality of competing truth claims in terms of religion (vv.16, 23), philosophy (v.18) and ideas generally (v.21). Thus, Paul seems to move in his argument from common ground (through 'points of continuity and contact') to a challenging of beliefs (through 'points of discontinuity and tension').

1. Paul's speech contains an implicit critique of Athenian attitudes towards religion and what's new. Paul's ambiguous statement about the religiosity of the Athenians (17:22) has

"good news" indeed was preached also in that area.

⁵⁰⁵ See also Peterson 1998b.

⁵⁰⁶ See also 1 Cor.15:3-20 and Acts 1:3,21-22 for the emphasis on the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Peterson points out that the Resurrection of Jesus "is critical to the argument [in Acts 17] because it is a 'proof' that the Creator God whom Paul represents is sovereign over nature and history, that he cannot be avoided and must in the end be judge of all. More particularly, it is a 'proof' of the significance of the man who was raised. The resurrection confirms the teaching about the importance of humanity in the divine plan set out in vv. 25-28. At the same time, it affirms that there is one man who is to be the standard and the agent of divine judgement for all." (Peterson 1998b:55)

an ironic twist. Though being very religious, the Athenians were actually superstitious and ignorant about the true God. Paul claims to bring something, which is totally new to the Athenians. The 'good news' (17:18) is about a personal Creator actively revealing himself and reaching out to humanity in Jesus Christ. But many Athenians (17:18, 32a) reject this truly 'new teaching' (17:19). Luke brings out the irony of the situation in verse 21, with its comment on the Athenians' interest in novelties as such. The reader of Luke's narrative is thus able to discern an explicit critique of Athenian attitudes in 17:21-23.

2. Paul's strong critique of Athenian idolatry stands clearly out in Luke's account. The apostle's critique of idolatry is correlated to his emphasis on who God really is (17:23b, 29). Paul's deep indignation, when encountering the idolatry of Athens (17:16), is caused by his fervent monotheism. Paul's presentation of the one and true God was controversial in Athens, both when encountering the popular religiosity and the different philosophical schools. In his speech, Paul challenges popular idolatry, Stoic pantheism and Epicurean deism. As shown in the comments to 17:27 in 4.4.2.2, Paul implicitly suggests that who God really is, cannot be discovered simply by popular religion or sophisticated philosophy.

As shown in 3.4.3.2 and 4.4.1, the altar 'To an unknown god' implicitly functions as a devastating critique of all the other altars (17:23). The use of this altar in Paul's argument is strengthened by the explicit temple critique (17:24ff) and by Paul's quotation from one of the Stoic poets (17:28). It should also be noticed that Paul's emphasis is on God as being

⁵⁰⁷ Green, M. 1970:154.

truly personal (17:24ff, *contra* Stoicism) and God as being really close (17:27, *contra* Epicureanism). All this leads up to Paul's key conclusion in 17:29, characterized by logical persuasion ('ought not to think') and presupposing a concession from his audience that the premise of the poets was correct. Paul claims thus that idolatry simply does not make sense, neither in the light of who God really is nor of humanity as his 'offspring'. Therefore, Paul challenges his listeners to reconsideration as well as repentance.

3. The idolatry critique leads thus naturally to Paul's emphasis on conversion in 17:29-31, which functions as a critique of the religious pluralism of ancient Athens (as well as implicitly of the Roman empire in general). Contrary to the philosophical schools of Stoicism and Epicureanism, Paul did not accommodate his beliefs to popular piety.⁵⁰⁸ Paul's arguments in 17:29-31, therefore, implied an obvious conflict with the Roman imperial policy on religion, since veneration of the deceased emperors was held to be an integral part of loyalty to the Roman authorities.⁵⁰⁹

4. As shown previously (see 5.2.2.1), the Athenians used the altar 'To an unknown god' as

⁵⁰⁸ This illustrates the crucial difference *between* modifying or changing one's beliefs *and* identifying 'points of continuity and contact'.

⁵⁰⁹ Christians would not yet (i.e. around 49 A.D.) feel the full implications of this, since they still were seen as members of a Jewish sect. The protection Judaism provided for Christianity was ultimately removed at "the fall of Jerusalem and the payment of the Jewish temple tax for the support of the pagan temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in the reign of Vespasian" (Winter 1991:128). Winter points out, however, that in Athens "the issue between Paul and the Areopagus indirectly involved the Romans. He was thought to have been 'the herald of foreign deities' (17:18), and as such, would be required to give proof of their divinity, build a temple, and provide a feast day for the city. The only gods in effect to be recognized in this period were emperors on their accession to the throne and occasionally members of the imperial family, so his evangelistic activities

a religious 'safety precaution'. Paul's argument in 17:30-31 was intended as a critique of this Athenian 'escapism'. The apostle explains why God's punishment is delayed, given the conditions of ignorance and idolatry already described. The delaying of God's judgment indicates that God is gracious (17:30a), not that the Athenians are innocent. The tables are turned in v. 30b, when charging the listeners with false worship. God's judgment is introduced in v. 31a as the reason for repentance. Verse 31b presents Jesus as the Judge, and the Resurrection as the evidence given for this unique, delegated authority of Jesus. All this implies that God's judgment is inevitable and Athenian 'escapism' is futile.

5. When mentioning the Resurrection of Jesus (17:31), Paul is in tension with the negative statement about resurrection supposedly said at the foundation (i.e. the inauguration) of the Areopagus.⁵¹⁰ As argued in earlier chapters, the idea and fact of a physical, historical Resurrection was a) a crucial key to the meaning of the Christian Gospel⁵¹¹ but b) alien to Epicureans, Stoics and popular Athenian idolaters⁵¹². Paul's clear emphasis on the Resurrection of Jesus (17:18, 31) functions thus as a critique of Greek scepticism towards the Resurrection. This also implies that neo-Platonic dualism (which seemed to have been a commonplace in much Greek thought) was criticized in Paul's argument.⁵¹³

warranted further investigation." (Winter 1999:215)

⁵¹⁰ See 4.5.2 (the textual comment to $\chi\lambda\epsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ in 17:32).

⁵¹¹ See 2.2.4, 4.4.3 (the comments to 17:31) and 4.5.1.

⁵¹² See the arguments in 3.2.2.1, 4.3 (in the textual comments to 17:18 and the critical comments to 17:20), 4.4.3 (in the comments to 17:31), and 4.5 (in the comments to 17:32) on Greek scepticism towards the idea and fact of a/the Resurrection.

⁵¹³ As Carson argues; "If the spiritual is good, the physical world bad, it is inconceivable that

6. The focus in the Christian Gospel (17:18, 31) was not on a mythological figure, but on recent historical events concerning Jesus Christ. This implies that the truth of the Christian Gospel can be established with reference to the historical evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus and that there is no valid excuse for unbelief.⁵¹⁴ This means that ‘the epistemic obligation’ of the Christian faith is emphasized.

5.3 Assessing Paul's Apologetic in Athens: Genuine, Effective and Relevant?

Building on the preceding analysis (5.2), the intention of this section is critically to evaluate Paul's apologetic approach in Athens. The historical authenticity of the Lucan account (see 1.2.3) was argued for in chapter 3 (see 3.3.1-2), but the theological validity of the Areopagus Speech – as apologetics – still remains to be properly assessed (see 1.2.4, 2.2.3 and 3.3.3). The focus in the present section, then, will be on *whether Paul's approach should be seen as genuinely Christian (5.3.1), effective (5.3.2) and relevant (5.3.3)*, as the means to assess its legitimacy as an apologetic model.

5.3.1 Paul in Athens: A genuinely Christian apologetic?

According to the Lucan summary in Acts 17, Paul's speech in Athens is characterized by no explicit Old Testament references, an extensive use of pagan material, and no

God, who is by definition good, would raise someone up to physical life, which is at least relatively bad. That is the very point that causes some to sneer (v. 32). But Paul does not flinch...” (Carson 1996b:501). See further 6.2.2.2.

⁵¹⁴ See also the use of ἀναπολόγητος in Rom.1:20.

mentioning of the cross of Christ. These unique features have led some commentators to question the speech as an example of genuine Christian apologetics.⁵¹⁵ Such a view may be assessed as follows. To be theologically valid, the speech must be shown to be theologically consistent with a) a positive, repeated pattern in Acts (as argued in 2.2), b) appropriate passages in Paul's letters (as argued in 3.3.3), and c) other relevant, biblical material.⁵¹⁶

5.3.1.1 *Paul and the Old Testament*

In the pluralistic settings in the *agora* (whether in open discussions or before the Areopagus), Paul could not refer to the OT Scriptures as a common religious authority. Thus, Paul knew "it would be futile to refer to a history no one knew or argue from fulfilment of prophecy no one was interested in or quote from a book no one read or accepted as authoritative."⁵¹⁷ This seems to be a key, widely recognized reason for the lack of explicit OT quotations in Paul's speech.

As shown in the exegetical study in the previous chapter, however, Paul used appropriate passages from the OT and expressed essential biblical truths in a way that would be understandable (but not necessarily acceptable) to his Gentile audience. These key Old Testament themes include God as Creator, Sustainer and Lord, as well as humanity as deriving from and seeking God, but at the same time characterized as ignorant, accountable and culpable. Paul's intention was thus to "establish an entire framework, a framework very largely at odds with the various outlooks of paganism, if the gospel of Christ was to be understood and accepted on its own terms"⁵¹⁸.

Moreover, a careful study of this implicit OT background to the Areopagus Speech indicates that Paul in Athens used the approach of key OT apologists such as Isaiah and

⁵¹⁵ See the discussions in 1.2.4, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

⁵¹⁶ It is outside the scope of this thesis to treat the relationship between the apologetics of Acts 17 and the wider (non-Pauline) biblical material in any detail or depth. This would require an in-depth study of esp. a) Old Testament apologetics and b) the apologetics of Jesus and the evangelists. The intention of 5.3.2.1, then, is only to indicate what can be said about Paul and the wider biblical material *on the basis of and within the scope of the present study*.

⁵¹⁷ Longenecker 1981: 475. See also Witherington 1998:530.

⁵¹⁸ Carson 1996b:503. See also Peterson 1998c:383-384 and 6.2.2.2.

Jeremiah. This is especially true in terms of Paul's critique of idolatry, which seems to be one of the main emphases of OT apologetics⁵¹⁹. Keyes has suggested that Paul in his speech takes his cue from the key text in Jer. 23:23-24, systematically contradicting "the near and far idols"⁵²⁰ of the Athenians with four alternating strokes, and correcting them "each time with a true vision of the immanence and transcendence of God".⁵²¹ This implies that Paul, by applying this OT prophetic paradigm (of the 'nearby' and 'faraway' idols) to Stoic pantheism and Epicurean deism, was able to speak meaningfully into this non-Jewish context.

The apostle did not have to quote – or refer to – the Jewish Scriptures explicitly in order to speak or establish biblical truth. The theological content of Paul's message in Athens is a) in accord with the personal God revealed in the OT and b) shaped by his belief that this one, true God now ultimately is made known through Jesus.

⁵¹⁹ See Mæland 1985:22-25.

⁵²⁰ According to Keyes 1992:37-40, the 'nearby' idol (ex. Jer. 10:5) counterfeits God's immanence, whereas the 'faraway' idol (ex. Is. 65:11) counterfeits His transcendence.

⁵²¹ Keyes 1992:47. It is appropriate at this point to quote Keyes' illuminating summary of Paul's speech in extenso: "First, Paul contradicts their idea that God is unknown. God is not a far idol that is unknowable (verse 23). Then he contradicts their near idols by saying that God does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor does He need our help for anything (24-25). Next he attacks the far idol when he declares that God is not far from each one of us, for, 'In him we live and move and have our being' (27-28). Finally, he negates the near idols again by reasoning that if we are *God's* offspring, then it does not make sense to believe that He is *our* offspring. God is not made of gold, silver, or stone and fashioned by human artistry (29). The apostle seems to have keyed his critique explicitly into the dual nature of their idolatry. He saw the specific way that they had counterfeited both God's immanence, miniaturizing Him, and God's transcendence, vaporizing Him. With each of these negations, Paul makes an affirmation about the one, true God, in contrast to the counterfeits. God is knowable, Paul says, and he proceeds to tell the listeners about Him (23). He is the Lord of heaven and earth, and gives life to all people (24). God made the nations to live on the earth, and wants them to seek after Him to find Him (26-27). God is our source, not the other way round (29). In all these points, God is both immanent and transcendent. He is never a God 'at hand' or 'far off'. He is never unable to see, hear, speak, or act. He fills heaven and earth. The apostle Paul went on to declare the ultimate moral challenge - the need for repentance for all people, everywhere, and foretold of the man, raised from the dead, who will one day stand in judgment over the world." (Keyes 1992:47-48; underlining added)

5.3.1.2 *Paul's use of pagan material*

The previous discussion has shown that Paul used some pagan material in an (at least partly) approving way in Athens. There are two explicit quotations from pagan sources (the altar 'To an unknown god' and the poet Aratus) and many possible allusions to Hellenistic philosophy in Paul's speech. The key to the apostle's use of pagan material (as indicated in 3.4.4.3) is found in the approach taken by Jewish apologists to the Hellenistic world. As Gärtner has shown convincingly (cf. 3.2.1), Paul follows their approach closely.

Paul's intention in Athens, as an apostle to the Gentiles, was thus to communicate the Christian message in a way that was both authentic and relevant.⁵²² In order to relate to his audience in a meaningful way, Paul adapted concepts and expressions from their religion, culture and philosophy. These functioned for communicative purposes as 'points of contact'. But Paul seems to have gone a step beyond this to 'points of continuity'. Some (revelational) presuppositionalists⁵²³ have objected to this understanding of Acts 17:16-34. L. Thornton points out that C. van Til "makes it very clear that Paul is not accepting [any] common ground [with] another system".⁵²⁴ J. Frame expresses the same basic opinion (somewhat more moderately than van Til) in a key statement:

"Thus the presuppositional apologist need not be embarrassed by Acts 17:16-34. In that passage Paul does not appeal to some "neutral" criterion of truth but to the revealed knowledge of God that even pagans (unbelievers) are unable to escape. In the Acts passage, contrary to their own inclinations.

⁵²² See e.g. Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989:199-201 and Baasland 1991:115-185.

⁵²³ Geisler has coined the term 'revelational presuppositionalism' to describe the apologetics of C. van Til and J. Frame, in order to distinguish them from a) the 'rational presuppositionalism' of G. Clark and C. F. H. Henry, b) the 'systematic consistency' approach of E. J. Carnell and G. Lewis, and c) the 'practical presuppositionalism' of F. A. Schaeffer (Geisler 1999:607-608; for a slightly different interpretation of Schaeffer, see also Lewis, G. 1986). See also 6.2.1.

⁵²⁴ Thornton 1986:7. See also Dennison 2000.

Paul's pagan audience admits two truths of the Christian faith: their own ignorance (v. 23) and God's immanence (v. 28). But as in Romans 1, Paul condemns them for having *resisted* this revelation. There is no reason why the apologist cannot agree with certain elements of unbelieving thought, as long as he takes account of the fact that unbelievers seek to suppress the truth that they know. Such agreements, then, are not appeals to common or neutral criteria; they are appeals to the truth that Scripture warrants (though it be found on unbelieving lips)."⁵²⁵

This perspective seems to be partially right, but it does not seriously enough take into account the common rationality shared by all humans and the fact that 'all truth is God's truth'⁵²⁶. Paul clearly seems to have affirmed elements of truth within Stoicism and Epicureanism, implicitly appealed to (and acknowledged) the traditional philosophical arguments against idolatry, and emphasized logical persuasion (17:29) as well as the public nature of the evidence of the resurrection (17:31).

It was thus appropriate of Paul to affirm whatever truths there might be in the diverse belief-systems in Athens. Stoicism and Epicureanism are seen as inadequate 'half-truths' that emphasize either God's immanence or God's transcendence, i.e. the one truth at the expense of the other.⁵²⁷ By his use of the altar and the poet, Paul is also able to affirm, that humanity "had a natural awareness of God which was consonant with the revelation of God in the OT and Christian experience"⁵²⁸.

This ties in with the function of the altar *Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ* as an implicit and devastating critique of all the other altars, thereby affirming both biblical monotheism and the

⁵²⁵ Frame 1987:367-368.

⁵²⁶ See esp. Holmes 1977.

⁵²⁷ See further 5.3.4.3.

⁵²⁸ Brown points out that this knowledge "is sufficient to show the error of identifying God with any finite thing or creature ... Man has this awareness already. and reflection on the finite character of the natural order should be sufficient to tell him that God is not to be identified with anything or anyone within that order." (C. Brown in Schneider, J. et al 1986:77)

traditional philosophical critique of religion as foolish idolatry. This also implies that Paul used the pagan material both as 'points of continuity and contact' and as 'points of discontinuity and tension'.⁵²⁹ As indicated in 3.4.4.3, this dual approach should be called 'polemical engagement'.

Paul's use of pagan material in Acts 17:16-34 is thus a significant example of genuine Judeo-Christian apologetics.

5.3.1.3 Paul and the cross of Christ

According to Paul in 1 Cor. 15:1ff, the cross and the resurrection of Christ constitute the core of the Christian Gospel. The theological consistency with 1 Cor. 2:1-2 has already been argued for in 3.3.3.2, but the fact still remains that the cross of Christ is never mentioned explicitly in Luke's narrative in Acts 17:16-34. *To seek to explain this textual feature is then to argue from silence and has to be seen as such.* In the light of the preceding discussion, however, the following conjecture seems to be the most plausible one.

1. It has been suggested that, since Luke only provided a summary of Paul's speech, the

⁵²⁹ Many contemporary commentators and apologists, however, seem to emphasize *either* 'points of continuity and contact' *or* 'points of discontinuity and tension' in their analysis and use of Acts 17:16-34. But, as shown in 5.2 and 5.3, Paul's apologetic in Athens showed awareness *both* of 'common ground' *and* of 'the scandal of particularity'. *This illustrates that both 'points of continuity and contact' and 'points of discontinuity and tension' should be emphasized if Acts 17:16-34 is to be understood properly as apologetics.*

apostle in fact did mention the cross of Christ before the Council.⁵³⁰ It is possible that the cross-event is mentioned in Paul's speech (as the background to the resurrection), but it seems highly unlikely that the theological significance of the cross is mentioned in this setting. The Areopagus Speech makes perfect sense as it is, as (a highly condensed summary of) a follow-up talk intended to clarify misunderstandings and to present the evidence for 'Jesus and the Resurrection'. What are present in Paul's speech, however, are humankind's ignorance and guilt, God's righteous anger, God's grace (or his forbearance), and the need for and possibility of a new relationship with God. Such an argument is theologically consistent with Paul's preaching and teaching of God's law and the Christian Gospel elsewhere.

2. According to Luke, Paul's preaching in the *agora* was on "the good news of Jesus and the Resurrection" (17:18). It seems highly probable to suppose that this initial proclamation and defence of the Gospel in the *agora* included an explicit mentioning of the cross-event and possibly also something about the redemptive significance of the death of Christ. The emphasis in Paul's message, though, seems to have been on the credibility and significance of the Resurrection of Christ.

3. It has also been suggested that Paul's presentation before the Areopagus was interrupted before Paul got to the message of the cross.⁵³¹ This proposal, however, seems to be unnecessary for the following reasons. *First*, Paul's speech in 17:22-31 has a coherent and

⁵³⁰ See e.g. Stott 1990:289 and Danbolt 1967; cf. also 3.3.3.2

complete structure rhetorically and theologically. *Secondly*, through his speech Paul is seeking to establish a biblical framework (“which alone makes the good news of Jesus Christ coherent”⁵³²), both in order to clarify initial misunderstandings and to provide a basis for subsequent evangelism. *Thirdly*, Jesus is introduced in an indirect way (ἐν ἁνδρὶ) in order to generate interest and to arouse curiosity, and no full doctrinal presentation was thus intended or required. *Fourthly*, the emphasis on the evidential nature of the Resurrection in 17:31 makes sense as an appropriate and challenging conclusion to Paul’s apologetic argument.

4. It has also been observed that Paul primarily focused on the atoning aspects of the death of Jesus in the preaching and teaching for Christian converts. Nordlander argues thus that a pagan audience like the one facing Paul in Athens would not be able to grasp the deeper theological meaning and significance of the cross.⁵³³ Nordlander’s proposal may have to be modified in the light of a) the discussion in 5.3 and b) the fact that 1 Cor. 15:1-8 includes “that Christ died for our sins” among “the first things” communicated to pagans becoming Christians in Corinth. This would imply that a pre-evangelistic presentation – on the nature of God, the human responsibility and the possibility and necessity of conversion – usually seems to be needed, if the deeper theological redemptive message of the cross is to be grasped by pagans who are biblically illiterate.

⁵³¹ See 4.5 (the textual comments to 17:32).

⁵³² Carson 1996b:504; see further 6.2.2.2.

⁵³³ See Nordlander 1990:230-231,238-240.

The intention of Paul's follow-up talk (before the Council) was thus to present the Athenians with a Christian theistic view of the world. This was done so that they could make sense of the Christian Gospel (including the redemptive message of the cross of Christ) within a proper biblical framework. Luke would clearly consider such an approach as a key example of genuine Christian apologetics.

5.3.2 Paul in Athens: An effective apologetic?

The discussion above has shown that Paul's apologetic in Athens is a significant and theologically valid example of Judeo-Christian apologetics. This leads to the question whether Paul's approach in fact was effective, when encountering a situation characterized by both curiosity and criticism (see 3.5.1.4). Paul elsewhere describes the critical attitude of the Greeks to the Gospel of "Christ crucified". It was considered as "foolishness" (see 1 Cor. 1:18ff).⁵³⁴

5.3.2.1 A successful apologetic?

Paul faced a challenging cultural context in Athens, where there were significant questions, objections, and alternatives to the Christian Gospel. This implies that the apologetic task was demanding and difficult. An appropriate assessment – of whether Paul's apologetic in Athens should be considered a failure or a success – must therefore be done both on the basis of the apostle's aims and his results.

⁵³⁴ Stott remarks perceptively that Paul, when encountering Greek cities like Athens and Corinth, "knew that his message of Christ crucified would be regarded as intellectually foolish (incompatible with wisdom), religiously exclusive (incompatible with tolerance), personally humiliating (incompatible with self-esteem), morally demanding (incompatible with freedom) and politically subversive (incompatible with patriotism)." (Stott 1992:67)

1. What did Paul intend to achieve through his speech? The argument in previous chapters has shown that the apostle had a dual aim with his apologetic speech (see 3.5.1.4, 4.4.3 and 4.5.1). The *immediate* aim, when faced with this critical audience, was to arouse curiosity and to generate genuine questions among the listeners concerning the Christian faith. Paul's role in Athens was primarily "as a sower and pioneer rather than a reaper"⁵³⁵. This corresponds to the reaction in 17:32b and ties in well with the function of apologetics as pre-evangelism.⁵³⁶ Paul's *final* aim, though, clearly was conversion to the Christian faith. This corresponds to the positive reactions in 17:34 and to the strong sense of epistemic obligation present in Paul's speech (especially in 17:29-31).

2. It seems to be common among the commentators, however, to interpret 17:32-34 as indicating a failure on Paul's part, exchanging the curiosity (of 17:18-21) with rejection.⁵³⁷ But, as Carson argues (and as shown in 4.5), "a careful examination of Luke's handling of the various addresses reported in Acts show that *he* did not think this one a failure".⁵³⁸ As argued above, the short-term results in 17:32b and 17:34 correspond to the dual aim of the speech. Seen in the light of Paul's realism in e.g. 2 Cor. 4:1-6, the mocking rejection recorded in 17:32a was to be expected, not least in a challenging setting such as Athens.

⁵³⁵ Prior, K. 1995:29-30.

⁵³⁶ See 1.2.2. The understanding of apologetics as pre-evangelism is also found e.g. in Mæland 1985:112-125; McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:16-18; and Colson & Percy 1999:30-33.

⁵³⁷ See e.g. Allen, R. 1962:66; Larsson 1987:395-96; Pesch 1986:140-41; Roloff 1981:266-67; and Schneider, G. 1982:243-44. *If* the results in 17:32-34 are to be seen as indicating a failure (which by no means is the most natural interpretation; see the exegetical discussion in 4.5), Conzelmann's comment seems wise: "In Luke's view Paul fared well in this encounter: the conclusion of the scene is not meant to portray any failure on Paul's part, but rather a failure on the part of the Greeks." (Conzelmann 1987:147)

This latter reaction does indicate that Paul's message hit some target in the Athenians, when they were confronted with the true offence of the Gospel.

3. Nothing is said in the Lucan text about long-term results of Paul's visit, neither seems much to be known about this from other historical sources.⁵³⁹ The absence of any evidence of baptisms or church planting in Athens in the first century remains an historical enigma. *We are thus left with arguments from silence.* However, Prior points to the possible historical link between Paul and later apologists in Athens such as Athenagorus.⁵⁴⁰

The preceding discussion has shown that Paul's apologetic in Athens was no failure. Paul's *apologia* for the truth of the Gospel was intended as conceptual clarification, a critique of Athenian beliefs, as well as positive support for the adoption of the Christian Gospel, in order that it should make sense to the Athenians.⁵⁴¹ Regardless of how the results should be evaluated, however, it is important to recognize (with Rapske) that

⁵³⁸ Carson 1996b:503; see also 6.2.2.2 and Barr 1993:28-32.

⁵³⁹ Kruse points out accordingly, that there is "no mention in the New Testament of a Christian community there, or any indication of what ministries were exercised in it after the apostle left" (Kruse 2000:208).

⁵⁴⁰ Prior argues that it is possible to know "that a church was established in Athens, although we know little of its earlier history... From the small beginnings, which resulted from Paul's visit, the church sooner or later grew, because by the first half of the second century it was quite flourishing. One of its major contributions was in the apologists it produced, the best known of whom was Athenagorus, a second-century Athenian, who wrote *A Plea for the Christians* and *On the Resurrection*. In view of Paul's emphasis on the resurrection, the latter title naturally attracts our attention. Its author was converted through reading the Scriptures with the original intention to discredit them and, significantly enough, it was the resurrection, which convinced him. Apologists like him followed in the steps of the apostle in presenting the faith meaningfully to the thinking people of their day." (Prior, K. 1995:169-170)

⁵⁴¹ Prior remarks that Paul's aim was to "convince people's minds of the truth of the gospel as the means of persuading them to submit their wills". (Prior, K. 1995:53)

success “is not an invariable Lucan criterion of significance”⁵⁴². Rapske adds: “Such a faulty criterion has led some to judge the Areopagus Speech a resounding failure to be repented of.”⁵⁴³ To argue from the number of converts to the appropriateness of the approach – or the correctness of the message – seems thus quite precarious, since (as observed by Brown in his reflections on this passage) “in and of itself public response to an idea is not a measure of its truth and validity”⁵⁴⁴.

5.3.2.2 *A significant apologetic?*

The significance of Acts 17:16-34, “the classical case of apologetics in the New Testament”⁵⁴⁵, seems evident in the light of the previous discussion.

1. At the most basic level, Paul's approach in Athens illustrates and illuminates context-specific (or applied) apologetics. As shown in 3.3.3.3, this account seems in total accord with Paul's explicit principles in 1 Cor. 9:19-23 to be “all things to all people”. Acts 17:16-34 has therefore been described as a “model for how to communicate the gospel into any and every context”⁵⁴⁶. As shown in 5.2, the passage shows Paul's awareness and understanding of the various contexts in Athens, as well as his argumentative strategies in responding to these challenges.

⁵⁴² Rapske 1994:358. Rapske's original reads ‘Lukan’.

⁵⁴³ Rapske 1994:358.

⁵⁴⁴ Brown 1990:67.

⁵⁴⁵ Geisler 1999:39; see also 1.3.

⁵⁴⁶ Cook 1995a:229.

2. The focus in the Lucan account is on Paul's apologetic approach when faced with a non-Jewish and pluralistic context. The significance of Acts 17:16-34 for apologetics should thus be further explored on the basis of Luke's explicit intention to record Paul's speech as a "typical exemplar of the first Christian sermons to the Gentiles"⁵⁴⁷. This passage (together with Acts 14:15-17) seems to be intended by Luke as a paradigm for approaching "the man without the Bible"⁵⁴⁸.

3. Paul's apologetic approach in this context seems highly significant. Through 'points of continuity and contact' Paul was seeking to establish common ground, without explicitly referring to the Scriptures. This was done in order to present the challenging and controversial truth claims of the gospel. The aim of Paul's apologetic was to show the Athenians that their "tragedy and foolishness was that they themselves as humans were not even fulfillable on the basis of their own integration point. Their alienation was self-chosen; their aspirations were higher than the idols they worshipped ... [and] to live out the logic of their presuppositions is to accept alienation as a way of life."⁵⁴⁹

The intention of the apostle seems thus to have been to argue that their beliefs/worldviews actually were in tension with their way of living and with reality itself. Paul's emphasis is on how the Christian Gospel, on the other hand, fits the way humans are, "not in any limited religious category but in the whole of our humanity. It is not a question of heredity

⁵⁴⁷ Gärtner 1955:71. I would disagree with the description 'sermon', though, as argued in 3.4-5.

⁵⁴⁸ The expression is found in Schaeffer 1969:79-96. See also 6.3.1.

⁵⁴⁹ Guinness 1994a:350.

or cultural chance, but of congruity with truth.”⁵⁵⁰ As shown in 5.3.2.1, this was basically the apologetic approach used by the OT prophets when confronted with paganism and idolatry.

4. As with the OT prophets, Paul's apologetics is at its very centre characterized by creational and providential monotheism. *The crucial theological significance of Acts 17:16-34 is therefore that "the motivation and basis on which we 'do' apologetics must be God and his nature"⁵⁵¹*. This leads to a number of fundamental considerations.

First, as shown in the comments to 17:16-17 (see 4.3.1-2), Paul was moved to apologetics because of his zeal for the glory of God and his loving concern for the Athenians' needs since they were living without this one and true God. This shows the depth and power of Paul's motivation as an apologist.⁵⁵²

Secondly, Paul's deep understanding of who God is, is not only the key to his motivation, but also (as shown in 5.3.1) to his strategy. Paul's clear grasp, therefore, of God's transcendence and immanence gave the apostle apologetic tools for handling Athenian idolatry as well as Stoicism and Epicureanism.

Thirdly, Paul's combined emphasis on 'points of continuity and contact' and 'points of discontinuity and tension' seems to have arisen from his conviction of God as being both

⁵⁵⁰ McGrath, G. 1995a:162.

⁵⁵¹ Cook 1996:173.

⁵⁵² See esp. Stott 1990:278-280,290-291 and 4.3.1-2.

Creator and Redeemer. Paul saw humanity as created by God with a potentiality for a relationship with God, but at the same time as living alienated from God because of sin. Paul's awareness of God's redeeming initiative towards humanity made him look for God-given 'points of continuity and contact', whereas Paul's belief in the reality of sin and the necessity of a God-given salvation made him deeply conscious of existing 'points of discontinuity and tension'. Humanity is thus simultaneously attracted to and repelled by the Christian Gospel.

Fourthly and finally, Paul's approach in Athens demonstrates thus that apologetics must be grounded in God's disclosure in general and special revelation. The one and true God is making himself known to a blind humanity, both in an incomplete (but nevertheless real) way through creation⁵⁵³ and in a definite and more complete way through Jesus Christ. Paul was thus making the Unknown God known to the Athenians. This apologetic approach presupposes that 'all truth is God's truth', and ought to be identified and utilized as such, while at the same time recognizing that, ultimately, God's truth is uniquely and finally revealed in and through Jesus Christ. This implies that Luke and Paul would claim that a genuine and significant Christian apologetic neither can ignore elements of truth within

⁵⁵³ It is thus legitimate to conclude with Demarest (on the basis of the biblical evidence in Psalm 19:1-6, Acts 10:34-35, Acts 14:8-18, Acts 17:18-31, and Rom. 1:18-32) that general revelation "affords all people of all times and places rudimentary knowledge of God as Creator and moral law-giver. It also affords the Christian evangelist significant points of contact with the non-Christian world, thereby serving as a valuable pre-evangelistic tool. General revelation, however, does not yield that higher knowledge of God that is redemptive." (Demarest 1991:151; see also Demarest 1982:227-262.)

other beliefs nor can avoid the 'scandal of particularity'⁵⁵⁴. Therefore, Paul both "acknowledged the truth and challenged the error in his hearers' beliefs".⁵⁵⁵

It seems to be legitimate to argue, then, as indicated in 4.6.2, that Luke has recorded Paul's speech as "an object lesson in apologetics",⁵⁵⁶ in order to illustrate a typical first-century Christian approach to pagans⁵⁵⁷.

5.3.3 Paul in Athens: A relevant apologetic?

The assessment so far has shown that Paul's apologetics in Athens should be seen as both genuine and significant. This leads the question of its relevance. Was Paul's apologetic approach really relevant then – and thus appropriate to the ancient Athenian situation? The appropriateness of Paul's receptor-orientated approach can be seen in his attempt to be meaningful, involving and challenging.

5.3.3.1 A meaningful apologetic?

After initial misunderstandings (see 3.5.2), Paul seems to have adopted a flexible and sensitive approach relative to the different contexts in Athens. As shown in 5.2. he started where they were – whether in the synagogue or in the informal and formal contexts of the

⁵⁵⁴ The 'scandal of particularity' is "the Christian claim that the climax of God's saving revelation is tied to a particular time, a particular place and (above all) a particular person" (Bruce 1977:89).

⁵⁵⁵ Demarest 1991:138.

⁵⁵⁶ McGrath, A. 1992a:49. See further 6.2.2.1.

⁵⁵⁷ Regardless of their perspective on the text, this seems to be the view of many of the

agora, established and developed points of contact, and argued for the truth of the Gospel on the basis of this common ground. This implies that Paul did not consider an explicit use of Scripture a necessary prerequisite for authentic and relevant apologetics, when the audience did not share his knowledge of and belief in the Jewish Scriptures. As shown above (in 5.3.1-2), the apostle seems to have considered this approach as the most meaningful approach to such a pagan audience.

5.3.3.2 *An involving apologetic?*

The relevance of Paul's apologetic approach is also seen in his critical (or polemical) engagement⁵⁵⁸ with the worldviews of the pagan Athenians. As shown in 3.4.4.1, Stoics and Epicureans could appropriately be described as pagan apologists, arguing for the truth of their beliefs and traditionally arguing against idolatry. The Lucan account shows Paul as a Christian apologist among these pagan apologists, effectively using the philosophers' own arguments and their own poets to uncover their pragmatic accommodation to the religious pluralism of the day. The apostle is thus exposing the fallacies of Stoicism and

commentators.

⁵⁵⁸ Wright suggests that Acts 17 exemplifies this principle, which (he claims) secures the relevance of the Gospel: "What the Gentiles needed was precisely the Jewish message, or rather the Jewish message *as fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah* ... The nature of this polemical engagement is thus that Paul is claiming the high ground from his pagan hearers ... The Jewish belief in the creator meant that any Jew who cared to do so (and Paul certainly cared to do so) could address the pagan world with a message from its true God, its creator. The message, paradoxically, *had* to remain essentially Jewish if it was to have its proper relevance to the pagans. If it had been translated into pagan categories it would have competed with them for their own turf. It would have made YHWH one God among the other gods. By remaining what it was, it claimed the high ground of genuine creational monotheism." (Wright 1997:82-83)

Epicureanism on their own grounds as well as showing the folly of idolatry. This implies that Paul's speech in fact is a highly sophisticated apologetic speech.

5.3.3.3 A challenging apologetic?

When arguing with popular piety, Stoicism and Epicureanism, the focus of Paul's argument in Athens is the nature of the one, true God as both transcendent and immanent.

As shown above (see 3.4.3-4, 4.4 and 5.2-3), this was done in a way, which functioned as a very compelling critique (i.e. as a 'positive deconstruction'⁵⁵⁹) of these Athenian belief-systems. 1. *Popular Athenian religion* was shown by Paul to be *both* inconsistent in its practice of idolatry alongside the (implicit) belief in the Unknown God *and* inadequate in its escapism and superficiality. 2. *Stoicism* was shown by Paul to be a) inconsistent in its acceptance of popular idolatry, b) simultaneously affirming the evidence for divine immanence (with an emphasis on divine providence) and suppressing the evidence for divine transcendence (as well as the evidence for the Resurrection), and c) indifferent to genuine human relationship with God as a result of the emphasis on 'fatalism, submission

⁵⁵⁹ Pollard and Watkins have suggested that Paul's critical engagement with Athenian worldviews is a key role model of the strategy and process of '*positive deconstruction*' (see also 1.1.2). They describe this strategy (which Pollard quite surprisingly distinguishes from the task of apologetics, which he narrows down to giving 'a reasoned defence for the Christian faith' (Pollard 1997:128)), as a five-stage process: 1) to identify the influential worldviews in a given context, 2) critically to analyse such worldviews on the basis of common criteria of truth, 3) to discover and affirm elements of truth in these worldviews, 4) to discover and challenge elements of error in these worldviews, and 5) to identify an appropriate Christian response over against these worldviews. This popular, but perceptive, analysis of Paul's apologetic strategy in Athens (which is indebted to Cook 1996 and found in Pollard 1997:43-59 and Watkins 1999:91-121; see also 1.2.2 and 5.4.2.5) seems largely consistent with the analysis and assessment offered in this

and the endurance of pain'. 3. *Epicureanism* was shown by Paul to be a) inconsistent in its acceptance of popular idolatry, b) simultaneously affirming the evidence for divine transcendence (with an emphasis on divine aseity) and suppressing the evidence for divine immanence (as well as the evidence for the Resurrection), and c) indifferent to human responsibility before God as a result of the emphasis on 'chance, escape and the enjoyment of pleasure'.

But there is also another underlying reason for this focus on who and what God is. The nature of God has a key place in any (religious) belief-system. It follows from this that the changing of beliefs in this area will have consequences for all the other beliefs.⁵⁶⁰ A proper understanding of the nature of the one, true God, would thus remove the initial Athenian misunderstandings concerning "the Gospel of Jesus and the Resurrection". When Paul in his speech moves from who God is to the final argument concerning the judgment of God and the resurrection of Jesus, this is specifically intended as a challenge to Athenian beliefs. In the face of Athenian disbelief⁵⁶¹, Paul provides πίστις about God's final judgment. God has the final say. This argument creates a diversity of Athenian reactions, which indicates that Paul's message had been meaningful, involving and challenging.

chapter.

⁵⁶⁰ Burnett observes thus accordingly, that the concept of the nature of deity is an important theme within any worldview "because it lays an important foundation which has repercussions for other themes. We see Paul speaking to the people of Athens using just this sort of approach ... He commences with their concept of an unknown god, and from this point goes on to present a biblical concept of the nature of the Supreme Creator." (Burnett 1990:229-230)

⁵⁶¹ See 4.4.3-4.5.1.

5.4 Conclusions

5.4.1 An identifiable and positive apologetic model?

The first major research question (see 1.5.1) focused on *whether the apologetic model in Acts 17:16-34 is identifiable and positive, and if so, what its significant elements are and its status may be*. These aspects are addressed in this section, primarily on the basis of the preceding analysis and assessment in 5.2-3.

The question of whether Acts 17:16-34 contains an identifiable apologetic model needs to take into account the nature of this Lucan narrative. It was argued in previous chapters, in response to 1.4, that this Lucan description should be seen both as an *authentic* account (see 2.4.3.3 and 4.6) and as *representative* of Paul's apologetic thinking and practice (see 3.3.3). This Lucan narrative, however, presents a highly condensed summary of Paul's apologetic in Athens, and can therefore in no way claim to be a *complete* model of the apostle's approach in *agora* contexts such as Athens. There is thus a need to be cautious, both in terms of explicit and implicit apologetic elements in the Lucan account. However, the originally assumed definition of apologetics (in 1.2.2) provides, together with 5.2-3, a basis for the identification of various significant elements of this Lucan-Pauline apologetic model in Acts 17:16-34.

The preceding discussion in this chapter has identified a number of explicit and implicit elements in this text related to apologetic challenges and responses. Such elements – from the Lucan account of the original encounter between *the orator (Paul) and the*

oratees (the Athenians) – include the following: 1) Paul was shocked by Athenian idolatry. 2) Paul reacted to the idolatry by setting forth truth claims about ‘Jesus and the Resurrection’. 3) Paul’s initial presentation was misunderstood and provoked curiosity. 4) Paul was confronted by significant questions, objections and alternatives to the Christian faith. 5) Paul applied different justification procedures in the synagogue and the *agora*, and here he focused on challenges in the pluralistic *agora* context. 6) In his speech before the Areopagus, Paul engaged significant alternative worldviews and argued for the truth of essential Christian truth claims.

These elements must be supplemented with apologetic perspectives related to the probable intentions of *the narrator (Luke)* and needs of *the narratees (Theophilus and other Christian readers)* in writing and reading about Paul as apologist in Athens. This leads to the question whether Acts 17:16-34 originally was intended, understood and applied as a positive apologetic model.

It was suggested in 2.4 and confirmed in 4.6, that Luke *approves of Paul’s overall apologetic approach in Athens*, since it both conforms to a positive apologetic pattern in Acts and can be related to a plausible apologetic purpose of Acts. This implies (as argued in 4.6) that Luke wrote this to his Christian readers *both* as a confirmation of the truth of their Christian faith (over against pagan religious and philosophical alternatives) *and* as a role model for their apologetics (providing them with apologetic tools for contexts characterized by pagan beliefs and biblical illiteracy). It seems plausible, in the light of chapters 2, 4 and 5, that these Lucan perspectives were communicated effectively to the

narratees. Accordingly, the theory that Acts 17:16-34 is a Lucan description of a *mistaken* overall apologetic approach by Paul – and thus, as a whole, would constitute a negative role model – has previously been rejected as incompatible with the biblical evidence.⁵⁶²

This section, then, has argued for the plausibility of interpreting the apologetics of Acts 17:16-34 as an overall positive role model, where Luke provided his readers with “the beginnings of a model and some important lessons to follow”⁵⁶³.

It remains to assess, however, a) whether there may be *any negative elements*, where Luke intended his readers to learn from any supposedly apostolic mistakes in Athens, and b) whether the identified positive elements in the model should be considered as *normative, recommended or repeatable*.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² See esp. 4.5 and 5.3.3.1.

⁵⁶³ Cook 1996:171. Witherington claims, accordingly, that it is "hard to doubt that Luke sees this speech in Acts 17 as something of a model for how to approach educated pagan Greeks, and means it to reflect positively on his hero Paul, especially since he records only three major speech summaries from Paul's travels, and this is the only major one specifically directed at Gentiles". (Witherington 1998:533)

⁵⁶⁴ *On the one hand*, to interpret the overall model in Acts 17:16-34 as '*normative*' seems to be to claim too much. Such an interpretation seems foreign to the nature of the Book of Acts, as indicated in chapter 2, since elements concerning the apostles' actions and strategies do not appear to be intended by Luke as prescribed approaches (i.e. as '*blueprints for action*') for the narratees. It seems plausible, however, that elements concerning the defining *content* of the apostles' truth claims should be seen as normative. *On the other hand*, to interpret the overall approach in Acts 17:16-34 as only a '*repeatable*' model seems - in the light of the discussions in chapters 2, 4 and 5 - to be to claim too little about the apologetic responses recorded in the Lucan account. Paul's overall apologetic approach and strategy seem thus not only to be possible, but intended by Luke as a *suggested and recommended approach*. It may be, however, that single elements of the model should be seen as '*repeatable*' rather than '*recommended*'.

5.4.2 Significant interlocking elements of the apologetic model in Acts 17:16-34

5.4.2.1 The truth claims as indicators of a Judeo-Christian worldview

This chapter has shown that Paul presented a number of essential Christian truth claims in Athens (see 5.2.2.2). These truth claims are indicators of the apostle's theological convictions, i.e. his Judeo-Christian worldview.

It has been pointed out that key theological convictions form the *basis* for the practice of apologetics (as defined in this thesis).⁵⁶⁵ This chapter has shown that Paul's apologetic in Athens was grounded in his theological commitment to a) creational and providential monotheism (as expressed by OT prophets; see 5.3.2.1 and 5.3.3.2) and b) the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel (as expressed in the apostolic *kerygma*; see 5.2.2.2 and 5.3.2.3).

This theological framework is not only the underlying basis for Paul's apologetic in Athens, but also seems to *inform* it explicitly.⁵⁶⁶ As shown in 4.4 and 5.3.3.2, *both* God's transcendence and immanence *and* God's self-disclosure in general and special revelation

⁵⁶⁵ Gustavsson points out, perceptively, that *there are at least four key theological convictions underlying the apologetic enterprise and making it both possible and plausible*: a) The consistency between the proclaimed Gospel and the content of the Gospel – as an open and public message in the marketplace; b) The consistency between God the Creator and God the Redeemer – thus through the Gospel God addresses humankind in its humanity; c) The continuity between the general and special revelation – thus indicating the consistency between God's World and God's Word; d) The continuity between a personal God and human persons made in God's image– thus making rational discourse about God possible and legitimate (Gustavsson 1997:201-204). *As argued in this chapter, these theological convictions are found - explicitly or implicitly - in Acts 17:16-34.*

⁵⁶⁶ The use of the word 'explicit' in this context does *not* imply that these theological convictions and apologetic strategies necessarily are obvious in the Lucan redaction, *but* rather

are key theological convictions informing Paul's apologetic strategy in Athens. On the one hand, Paul's Judeo-Christian understanding of God as both transcendent and immanent enabled the apostle to 'positively deconstruct' Athenian idolatry, Stoicism and Epicureanism (see 4.4, 5.2.2.1, 5.3.2.1 and 5.4.2.5). On the other hand, Paul's appreciation of God's self-disclosure generally in creation and specifically in history enabled the apostle simultaneously to affirm genuine elements of truth within other beliefs as well as the uniqueness of Christian truth claims about 'Jesus and the Resurrection' (see 4.4, 5.3.3.2 and 5.3.3.2.). This implies that 'all truth is God's truth' and "the uniqueness and finality of Christ"⁵⁶⁷ seem to have functioned – at least implicitly – as complementary strategic principles for Paul in Acts 17:16-34.

Thus, Luke describes Paul as an apologist steeped in a genuinely Judeo-Christian worldview in the midst of the challenging pluralistic and pagan context of Athens. As shown in 5.3, convictions about who God is and how he has revealed himself are at the core of the apostle's apologetic enterprise in Athens. It seems plausible to assume, then, that Luke intended this 'worldview element' of his model as normative, since it primarily relates to the defining content of Christian apologetics and not just to various strategic or tactical approaches.

that they seemed to have been obvious to Paul while being in Athens.

⁵⁶⁷ Cook 1995b:667; see also Zacharias 2000b.

5.4.2.2 *The need for a 'proactive' apologetic approach in agora contexts*

As noted above (see 4.3.3 and 5.4.1), Paul's initial presentation of 'Jesus and the Resurrection' in the *agora* was *misunderstood*, at least to a large extent.⁵⁶⁸ This is described in the context of pagan idolatry in Athens (17:16), which provoked Paul to proclaim the Gospel both in the synagogue and in the *agora* (17:17). The initial responses in the *agora* to Paul's new teaching were characterized by incomprehension, intrigue, and an invitation to the apostle to present his views before the Areopagus Council. Paul perceived that their ignorance was basic to their idolatry. This led to a renewed presentation and justification of Christian truth claims in this new setting. As in Lystra (Acts 14), Paul initially seems to have underestimated the influence of the pluralistic and pagan context on the listeners' appreciation of his Gospel about 'Jesus and the Resurrection'.

This may imply that Paul had to rethink his initial approach in Athens along more 'proactive' lines (probably in view of key OT precedents, as suggested in 5.3.2.1), and that the Areopagus Speech constitutes this renewed 'proactive' approach. Whereas Paul's initial 'reactive' presentation resulted in misunderstandings and curiosity, the apostle's later 'proactive' presentation provoked the Athenians to three different reactions: rejection, reconsideration and repentance. *As indicated in 4.3.3, this may be interpreted as an implicit and soft Lucan critique of the apostle's initial 'reactive' approach in Athens.*⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁸ This section is partly indebted to Cunningham 1993:21-26.

⁵⁶⁹ The alternative interpretative approach would be to see this element in the text as a Lucan

This way of interpreting the account seems plausible in the light of a) the dynamics of apologetic challenges and responses in Acts 17:16-34 as outlined in this chapter and b) the consistency with the pattern of the Lystra incident. It is appropriate to ask, however, why the previous experience of misunderstanding in Lystra didn't result in an initial 'proactive' approach in Athens. The reasons for this, though, may have been a) Paul's zealous reaction against idolatry, which (as shown in 4.3.1-2) was the direct cause for his initial communication in Athens, and/or b) Paul's possible initial over-estimation of the educated public in Athens (over against the uneducated crowd in Lystra).

Thus, Luke probably describes Paul as an apologist who gradually sees the need for a proactive approach in agora contexts. This would imply that Luke intended this both as a *negative* element (i.e. as a soft, implicit criticism of Paul's initial 'reactive' approach) and as a *positive, recommended* element (i.e. as an approval of Paul's willingness and ability to adopt a more 'proactive' approach when faced with such a challenging pagan and pluralistic context).⁵⁷⁰

emphasis on *the demanding nature of a religious and philosophical context like Athens*. This, it could be argued, is seen not only in the initial misunderstandings, but also in the absence of any evidence of long-term results of the visit. To expect immediate understanding after brief initial proclamations and dialogues and significant results after one follow-up 'lecture' in such a challenging context would thus be unrealistic. This would then be a contrast in the overall Lucan account to the results in comparable challenging contexts after long-term teaching (e.g. in Ephesus). Both interpretations seem possible in the light of the preceding discussion and may not necessarily be contradictory.

⁵⁷⁰ Thus, this should *not only* be seen as a *Lucan narrative technique* to create suspense.

5.4.2.3 *The contextual understanding of relevant questions, objections and alternatives in the agora*

It has previously been argued⁵⁷¹ that the *Lucan* description – of Paul as apologist in the Athenian *agora* – shows his contextual understanding of relevant questions, objections and alternatives to his truth claims about ‘Jesus and the Resurrection’. These apologetic challenges in Athens included the following (as indicated in the exegetical study of 17:17-21; cf. 4.3.2-5):

1. Key *questions* to the apostle’s claims were the explicit “Can we hear more about this?”, the implicit “Who are ‘Jesus and the Resurrection’?”, and the implicit “Is there a need for a new altar?”. The presence of these questions corresponds to the *Lucan* narrative aside about Athenian curiosity in 17:21.
2. Key *objections* to the apostle’s claims were the explicit “This is foolish!”, the explicit “This is foreign!”, as well as the implicit “If we are wrong, why is there no plague?”⁵⁷². The presence of these objections indicates that (at least) part of the audience had a critical attitude towards Paul.
3. Key *alternative* worldviews were popular Athenian religion, Stoicism, and Epicureanism. The key role of Paul’s polemical engagement⁵⁷³ with these beliefs indicates

⁵⁷¹ See the following sections: 2.4, 3.6.3, 4.6.2.2, 5.2.1.2 and 5.4.2.2.

⁵⁷² See 3.4.3.2 (4), 4.4.3, 5.2.2.3 (4), and 5.4.2.8.

⁵⁷³ See 5.3.4.3.

that the apostle was aware that such alternative belief-systems shape how the Christian worldview is perceived in a given context and thus affect people's questions and objections to Christian truth claims. Paul's understanding of these challenges enabled him to identify both legitimate 'points of continuity and contact' and significant 'points of discontinuity and tension'.

*Thus, Luke implicitly describes Paul as a Christian apologist with a contextual understanding of relevant questions, objections and alternatives in Athens to his claims about 'Jesus and the Resurrection'. This enabled him to reflect (in the light on his Judeo-Christian worldview; see 5.4.2.1) on how to respond appropriately to these challenges. It seems plausible (on the basis of the discussion in this chapter as well as in chapter 2) to assume that Luke intended this as a *highly recommended element* of the model.*

5.4.2.4 The application of appropriate justification procedures in the synagogue and the agora

As suggested in 2.2 and 2.4, and shown in 5.2.1, the Lucan description of Paul in Athens includes an increasing awareness of different justification procedures of the synagogue and the informal and formal *agora* contexts. The following conclusions on the justification procedures of the synagogue and the *agora* – and on the apostle's application of these – should be seen as indicative rather than definitive.

In the Jewish synagogue setting in Athens, it has been assumed in this chapter (see 5.2.1.1), on the basis of a consistent pattern elsewhere in Acts (as shown in 2.2), that Paul

sought to justify the truth claims of the Christian faith on the basis of Scriptural and historical evidence. Implicitly, in 17:17, Luke seems to describe the justification procedures of what might be called '*the Scripture community*', i.e. those, whether Jews, 'godfearers' or others, who had a knowledge of the OT Scriptures and a belief in it as God's authoritative revelation. The Lucan narrative seems to imply that the proper justification procedure for Paul in the context of 'the Scripture community' is to demonstrate the consistency between the OT Scriptures (as the assumed shared authority) and Christian truth claims about 'Jesus and the Resurrection' (as confirmed by historical evidence). The OT Scriptures were thus the common ground in the synagogue context in Athens.

The focus of Luke's narrative, however, is on *the pluralistic context of the agora*, both in terms of the open discussions in the marketplace (see 5.2.1.2) and the more formal setting before the Areopagus (see 5.2.1.3). Paul encountered Hellenistic people – both in the informal and formal contexts of the *agora* – who were biblical illiterates, had no knowledge of the Christian worldview, and did not accept the Jewish Scriptures as the final authority. A justification procedure on the basis of the formal authority of Scripture would thus have seemed largely irrelevant – or even invalid – in these pluralistic contexts. Paul seems to have been – or have become – aware of this, since he – at least gradually – is adopting a completely different justification procedure in these *agora* contexts.

This thesis has identified some of the key characteristics of Paul's apologetic approach in the *agora*: a) Paul appeals to available *evidence*, explicitly both to the altar (17:23) and

to the Athenians' human and religious experience (17:22-29) as 'signposts' of a transcendent-immanent God, and implicitly to the historical evidence for the Resurrection (17:31) as 'signpost' of the identity, authority, and credibility of Jesus. b) Paul appeals to Athenian *authorities and traditions*, explicitly to Aratus (17:28), and implicitly to Stoic and Epicurean philosophies in general (17:24-29) and possibly also to traditions associated with Epimenides (17:23, 28) and Aeschylus (17:31). These authorities and traditions are all seen as exponents of elements of truths (or at least as 'half-truths'). c) Paul appeals to *logic*, explicitly in terms of inference ('therefore') in 17:29a (a logical conclusion, given that the premise of the poets is accepted), and implicitly in terms of implication ('if ... then') in 17:30-31 (the appropriateness of conversion in view of the credibility of the Resurrection and the plausibility of the future divine judgment).

These appeals to evidence, Athenian authorities/traditions and logic seem to indicate that Paul assumed that there was a common ground between him and the Athenians, not only ontologically but also (at least to some extent) epistemologically. The *ontological common ground* is indicated in the references both to a shared created reality (since 'being, order and life' is in God; see 17:28) and to a shared, created humanity (since humanity is made in the image of God; see 17:28-29). This clearly implies, that – however differently reality may have been described and experienced by representatives of different worldviews in the Athenian *agora* – there is, according to Paul, an ontological givenness of shared, created reality and humanity. The *epistemological common ground* is indicated in what implicitly seems to be considered by Paul as common or shared criteria of truth. The appeals to evidence, authorities and logic mentioned above seem thus to be implicit appeals

to the criteria of coherence and consistency, correspondence with reality, and adequacy and relevance.

*Thus, Luke describes Paul as an apologist with an awareness of and an ability to apply appropriate justification procedures in various contexts, relative to whether people have any knowledge of the OT Scriptures and/or belief in the OT Scriptures as authoritative.*⁵⁷⁴

Luke's focus is on Paul's justification procedure in the pluralistic contexts of the *agora*.

The implicit premise of Paul's justification procedure in these '*agora* contexts' seems to have been, as indicated above, that a worldview should be seen as rationally justified if its central truth claims can be shown a) to be coherent, b) to correspond to the known facts, and c) to be adequate (i.e. whether a given worldview makes any difference and in that case what it changes and transforms). This interpretation of Paul's approach in Athens is consistent with Luke's description of Paul as an apologist in Acts 26:25-29 (see 2.3.3). This would imply that Luke intended this as a *highly recommended* element of his model.

5.4.2.5 The role and strategy of the 'positive deconstruction' of alternative worldviews

It has been shown (in 5.4.2.2) that the Lucan description of Paul shows an apologist with a proper contextual understanding, including an appreciation of the key role of worldviews. The Lucan account claims that Paul started where the Athenians were in his

⁵⁷⁴ For a significant parallel: see Blockmühl 1992 on the ethical argumentative approach of the early church in a pluralistic setting.

follow-up speech before the Areopagus, i.e. he started with their popular piety and with their Stoic and Epicurean beliefs. Paul claims that Stoicism and Epicureanism are ‘half-truths’ (see 5.3.3.3), thus simultaneously identifying and affirming elements of truth (i.e. ‘points of continuity and contact’; see 5.2.2.1) and identifying and challenging elements of error (i.e. ‘points of discontinuity and tension’; see 5.2.2.3) within these worldviews. The Lucan emphasis seems to be, then, that Paul *began* his apologetics with “the beliefs people were familiar with and showed that in Christ there was a better, fuller understanding of God”⁵⁷⁵. The apostle saw Stoicism and Epicureanism as influential beliefs, which a) do not fully or adequately explain both the transcendence and the immanence of God and b) should not have accepted the popular idolatry.

Paul relates the question of the nature of God to the question of the purpose of humanity. As shown in 5.3.3.2, Paul argued in Athens that human beings are not fulfillable – ultimately – on the basis of their own beliefs/views of themselves, but only on the basis of the one, true God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul’s implicit claim, then, as indicated in 5.4.2.4, seems to be that holding a non-Christian worldview, such as Stoicism and Epicureanism, in fact implies being in tension *both* with reality (since human beings are not fulfillable on the basis of their own views of themselves) *and* with God (since humanity substitute the one, true transcendent-immanent God with counterfeit idols).

⁵⁷⁵ Cook 1996:6. There seems to an element in the apostle’s ‘proactive’ apologetic approach in Athens of earning his right to speak about the Christian truth claims.

Thus, Luke describes Paul before the Areopagus as a 'proactive' Christian apologist who starts with the beliefs of the Athenians and 'positively deconstructs' these beliefs.⁵⁷⁶

Popular idolatry, Stoicism and Epicureanism are thus shown by Paul to be inconsistent, as failing to correspond to reality in key areas – and as much less adequate than the Judeo-Christian worldview. It seems plausible that Luke explicitly intended this approach – of beginning where the Athenians were – as a *recommended element* of his model, whereas the actual 'positive deconstruction' approach seems to be more implicit as a *recommended element* from the original Pauline setting.

5.4.2.6 The overall structure of the arguments for the Christian faith before the Areopagus

Luke describes Paul as countering the objection that he and his message are 'foolish' by presenting a coherent argument before the Areopagus in the *agora* about 'the knowable God' and 'Jesus and the Resurrection'. Paul's overall argument before the Areopagus could be expressed as follows (in the light of 4.4 and 5.2): 1) As shown by *natural theology* (i.e. Judeo-Christian reflections on how God's general revelation indicates the personal origin and sustenance both of the universe in general and of humanity specifically), the theistic God is the one and true God, 2) Whereas the delaying of this one and true God's judgment is evidence of his *mercy* in the past, the inevitability of the future judgment day is evidence

⁵⁷⁶ It should be noticed that the first part ('starting with their beliefs') is explicit in the Lucan account, whereas the latter part ('positively deconstructing their beliefs') is not necessarily evident in the Lucan redaction (see 3.3.2.1).

both of God's *ultimate authority* and of humanity's ultimate responsibility before him. 3) As shown by the evidence of the *Resurrection* (i.e. the historical evidence and its plausible implications), Jesus has already been given unique and final authority (as Judge) by this one and true God. Paul's overall argumentative structure seems consistent with the justification procedures in the *agora* (as outlined in 5.4.2.4).

The structure of Paul's overall argument seems thus to have been a move *from natural theology through ultimate authority to resurrection*. This would confirm the suggestion in 2.2.3 that Paul approached the Jews in Athens (and elsewhere) via the OT Scriptures and the pagans in Athens (and elsewhere) via the light of general revelation, i.e. an apologetic approach in each case on the basis of an assumed common ground (see above, 5.4.2.4). On the one hand, Luke seems to imply that, for Paul the evidence from the OT Scriptures and the evidence from general revelation point in the same direction, i.e. towards the ultimate authority of God – and the need for and the fact of his revelation in Jesus. On the other hand, Luke seems to imply that, when there is no knowledge of the OT Scriptures, Paul found it necessary (in his renewed, 'proactive' approach) to start with the nature of God and humanity and the authority and judgment of God before coming to the specific claims about 'Jesus and the Resurrection'.

Thus, Luke describes Paul as a Christian apologist with an overall argument before the Areopagus, where he moves from arguments about the credibility of a Judeo-Christian

natural theology through the plausibility and implications of God's ultimate authority to the significance and evidence of the Resurrection. It seems plausible to assume (in the light of chapters 2 and 5) that Luke intended this overall argument as *recommended* – both in its three main points and in how they are related – for apologetics in comparable pluralistic *agora* contexts.

The three main points of Paul's overall argument are expounded in the following (see sections 5.4.2.7, 5.4.2.8 and 5.4.2.9).

5.4.2.7 The content and role of 'the natural theology argument' for the Christian faith

The rhetorical starting-point for Paul's 'natural theology argument', which was delivered in the context of competing natural theologies (see 3.4.4.1), was the ignorance expressed in the altar 'To an unknown god'. This ignorance seems to have been interpreted by Paul, at least in relation to some Athenians, as a sign of openness and interest, since he claims that he will make known the true nature of the unknown god.

There are three parts to Paul's 'natural theology argument' (see 4.4.2 and 5.1.3), which (as indicated in 3.4.4.3) seems to have affinities with a Stoic apologetic 'natural theology outline': a) God has revealed himself as the sovereign Creator (transcendent) and Sustainer (immanent) of the universe (and thus also of the Athenians). These aspects – of who God really is – are in fact confirmed by the Athenians' own experience. b) This one, true God has significant intentions with humanity, both 'horizontally' (to fill the earth) and

‘vertically’ (to seek him). This God is near humanity, but humanity is actually blind. c) Humanity is God’s offspring, a fact confirmed by the Athenians’ own writer(s). The logical absurdity of idolatry should thus be evident, according to the apostle.

This argument has a number of functions in Paul’s apologetic: a) It simultaneously answers the question ‘Is there a need for a new altar?’ and meets the objection ‘This is foreign!’. b) It shows the plausibility of a Judeo-Christian natural theology over against alternative natural theologies such as Stoic pantheism and Epicurean (polytheistic) deism (see also 5.4.2.5). c) It provides a credible premise for Paul’s claims about God’s judgement - since God in fact has ultimate authority as the Creator and Sustainer.⁵⁷⁷ d) It provides a theistic context for Paul’s claims about ‘Jesus and the Resurrection’.

It should be noticed that, since there are no explicit appeals to ‘proofs’ of God’s existence in Paul’s argument, in this speech the created order seems to constitute the circumstances in which a Judeo-Christian belief in a transcendent-immanent Creator and Sustainer is ‘properly basic’, rather than to serve as the basis for inferring this Creator’s existence.⁵⁷⁸

Thus, Luke presents Paul as an apologist with the argument that, whereas natural theologies such as Stoicism and Epicureanism contain elements of truth, a Judeo-Christian natural theology provides the most adequate view of God, the universe and humanity. It seems plausible to assume that Luke intended this element of his model as recommended

⁵⁷⁷ See also Cook 1988b:51-56.

⁵⁷⁸ See also Craig in Cowan 2000:39.

for pluralistic contexts characterized by competing natural theologies and biblical illiteracy (since knowledge of and belief in the OT Scriptures do not constitute necessary premises for Paul's natural theology argument).

5.4.2.8 The content and role of 'the ultimate authority argument' for the Christian faith

Paul's 'natural theology argument' raised implicit questions about the status of the Athenians and about the authority of God. He anticipated these questions by presenting a subsequent 'ultimate authority argument', which is much more compressed in the Lucan account than the preceding 'natural theology argument'.

There are three parts to Paul's 'ultimate authority argument' (see 4.4.3): a) The delaying of the one, true God's judgment does not imply that the Athenians are innocent, but it is evidence of his abundant mercy in the past. b) The present status made known by Paul to the Areopagus Council is that God – as the authoritative Creator and Sustainer of the universe and humanity – summons all of humanity to repentance. c) The reason for this appeal to repentance is the inevitability of the future judgment: God – as the one with ultimate authority – has (already) set a day for judgment and appointed a Judge.

This argument has a number of functions in Paul's apologetic: a) It answers the implicit question 'If we are wrong, why is there no plague?'⁵⁷⁹. b) It relativizes or

⁵⁷⁹ See 3.4.3.2 (4), 4.4.3, 5.2.2.3 (4), and 5.4.2.3. This indicates the crucial difference between

deconstructs any claims from the Areopagus Council (or from any philosophical or religious worldviews) to any kind of ultimate authority.⁵⁸⁰ c) It challenges fundamental Athenian attitudes – such as their escapism, attempts at safety-precautions and feelings of self-sufficiency – as being futile. d) It presents God's final judgment (as an expression of his ultimate authority) as the plausible reason for the universal summon to repentance (thus claiming the 'epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith). e) It reintroduces the topic 'who is Jesus?' in an indirect and 'proactive' way.

Thus, Luke presents Paul as an apologist with the argument that the claim that the Judeo-Christian God has ultimate authority – as expressed in the claims about his final judgment – a) is plausible, since he is the Creator and Sustainer, and b) constitutes an appropriate basis for claims about 'the epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith. It seems plausible to assume (in the light of 3.3.3.1 and 5.2.2) that Luke intended this as a recommended element of his model for pluralistic, biblical illiterate contexts with competing claims to ultimate authority.

an Athenian concept of the capricious wrath of the gods 'here and now' and Paul's concept of God's righteous, final judgment.

⁵⁸⁰ Paul simultaneously seems to have *accepted* the formal procedural role of the Areopagus Council in relation to the introduction of 'foreign gods' into Athens and to have *challenged* any attempts of the Council or any of its members to relativize any Christian claims about absolute truth and ultimate authority.

5.4.2.9 *The content and role of 'the Resurrection argument' for the Christian faith*

Paul's 'ultimate authority argument' raised questions about the credibility of these claims, thus whether any evidence could be presented in favour of the staggering claims. He anticipated these questions by presenting a subsequent 'Resurrection argument', which is even more compressed in the Lucan account than the preceding 'ultimate authority argument'.

There seems to be two key parts to Paul's condensed 'Resurrection argument' (as indicated in 4.4.3 and 5.2.2): a) The Man of God's appointment was vindicated by God through his Resurrection, being exalted to a status of lordship and given ultimate authority. b) Paul states that credible and available historical evidence exists for this unique claim about the Resurrection of Jesus.

This argument has a number of functions in Paul's apologetic: a) It answers in an indirect way the questions 'Can we hear more about this?' and 'Who are Jesus and the Resurrection?'. b) It reintroduces the controversial question of the Resurrection (from 17:18) in a theistic context⁵⁸¹ with claims to ultimate authority. c) It implicitly introduces the Christian claims about the Resurrection as more attractive than Stoicism ('the soul lives on after death but is finally absorbed into god') or Epicureanism ('death is the end of all

⁵⁸¹ Paul seems thus to argue implicitly, over against Greek objections to the Resurrection (see 4.4.3), that, given the God of creation, providence and ultimate authority described in 17:24-30, the explanation or hypothesis 'God raised him from the dead' is neither impossible nor intrinsically more improbable than other explanations. (See also Craig 1998b:11-12.)

existence'), since the message of the Resurrection ('death conquered!') speaks to ultimate human needs and concerns. d) It provides evidence of the unique role of the man Jesus as God's appointed Judge. e) It implicitly invites the listeners to check the credibility of the historical evidence for the Resurrection.

Thus, Luke presents Paul as an apologist with an argument about the historical Resurrection of Jesus – as resonating with ultimate human concerns, as indicating the uniqueness and authority of Jesus, and as being based on sufficient, available evidence. It seems plausible (in the light of 2.2.4 and 5.2.2) to assume that Luke intended this element of his model as recommended for pluralistic, biblically illiterate contexts.⁵⁸²

5.4.2.10 The threefold apologetic aim: 'to interest', 'to persuade' and 'to confront'

The preceding discussion has shown that Paul presents the Christian faith – through the 'natural theology', the 'ultimate authority' and the 'Resurrection' arguments – as a coherent and adequate belief, which corresponds to the known facts. Paul's arguments were met with three different responses: mocking, interest and repentance. It seems plausible to assume (in the light of 4.4.3, 4.5.1, 5.3.2 and 5.3.3) that these responses – to a certain extent – correspond to what seems to have been Paul's threefold apologetic aim: 'to interest', 'to persuade', and 'to confront'.

⁵⁸² It should be noticed that a parallel argument was presented for Jews, which focused on the Resurrection as a confirmation of the unique, Messianic status of Jesus. See also 2.2.4.

It is evident from the Lucan text that Paul leads his hearers “from their self-confessed ignorance of the divine nature to the point where the Man of God's appointment is introduced”⁵⁸³. This resulted naturally, as shown above (see 5.4.2.5), in a critique of Athenian beliefs, where idolatry, 'escapism' and dismissal of a/the Resurrection constitute some significant ‘points of discontinuity and tension’. The mocking attitude (17:32a) of some Athenians (who obviously persisted in their pagan attitudes⁵⁸⁴) should thus probably be seen as indicating that the apostle *confronted* their untenable convictions at the basic worldview level. This may suggest that Paul in his apologetic seems to have confronted the unbelief when people persisted in their rejection of the Christian faith.

Some Athenians, however, expressed a genuine interest in listening further to Paul's justification of his claims (17:32b). This corresponds to Paul's positive and immediate aim *to generate further interest* in ‘Jesus and the Resurrection’ (see also 3.5.1.4). The apostle achieved this, not just by answering their questions but also by ‘proactively’ generating genuine and significant questions about the Christian faith.⁵⁸⁵ This could be seen as an implicit communicative principle underlying Paul's apologetic approach.

⁵⁸³ Bruce 1977:47.

⁵⁸⁴ The Lucan account seems to indicate that the mocking Athenians had blinded themselves to the truth.

⁵⁸⁵ This could have included questions such as these: “Does this Jewish herald of ‘foreign gods’ actually say the same things about idolatry as our own Socrates did way back?”; “If there is one, true God and he has raised this Jesus from the dead, is there really sufficient evidence to support this staggering claim?”; “This Jew Jesus must be unique, can you tell us more about him?”; “We want to obey this merciful and authoritative Creator and Sustainer, but what does it really mean to repent?”

Paul's ultimate apologetic aim, however, was to *persuade*⁵⁸⁶ interested Athenians of 'the epistemic obligation' of Christian truth claims about 'one God and one Lord', and the Lucan narrative shows that some Athenians were persuaded (17:34).

The structure of Paul's apologetic argument should thus be expressed in terms of a movement *from 'negative' to 'positive' apologetics*. In 17:22-28, Paul argues that the Christian view of God makes sense as it is in itself and over against Athenian questions, objections, and alternatives. But the apostle goes even further in his argument in 17:29-31, where he argues that the Christian view of God, divine judgment and the Resurrection, should be accepted as true on the basis of the supporting evidence. This means that Paul in his apologetics in Athens moves from 'the epistemic permission' to 'the epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith. The aim of Paul's approach is thus to justify his belief in a personal God and a risen Lord as well as to justify why the Athenians ought to believe in this Christian Gospel. This is conceptual clarification and a positive encouragement to – as well as a challenge to – belief.

Thus, Luke presents Paul as an apologist with a threefold apologetic aim: 'to interest', 'to persuade', and 'to confront'. There seems to be an underlying awareness (at least in the Lucan narrative and probably also in Paul's approach) that people's perspectives affect

⁵⁸⁶ It is instructive to compare this with Paul's explicit aim in 2 Cor. 5:11: "Therefore, knowing the fear of God, we try to persuade others." (On persuasion, see also Kemmler 1975:76-142.)

their perceptions. Accordingly, there is a need in apologetics to appreciate the relativity of people's presuppositions.

It seems plausible to assume that Luke wanted his readers to be aware of people's perspectives and presuppositions and to act in their apologetics according to this awareness. Luke seems to urge his readers, then, when encountering a degree of openness, to aim *primarily* to generate further interest about the Christian faith and *ultimately* to persuade people who are interested of 'the epistemic obligation' of the beliefs in 'one God and one Lord' – and when encountering scepticism, persistent rejection, and scorn to *confront* the unbelief.

6. APPLYING ACTS 17:16-34 AS AN APOLOGETIC MODEL 'NOW': A CRITICAL DIALOGUE WITH ALISTER E. MCGRATH AND DONALD A. CARSON

Outline:

6.1 Introducing the Chapter

6.2 A Common Apologetic Base and A Common Apologetic Challenge

6.3 A Critical Review of McGrath's and Carson's Apologetic Use of Acts 17:16-34 in

Relation to the Postmodern Challenge

6.4 Conclusions

6.1 Introducing the Chapter

6.1.1 Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model: From 'then' to 'now'

It seems appropriate to start this chapter with a biblical scholar's claim about the relevance of Acts 17:16-34 to contemporary apologetics:

“Contemporary apologists for Christianity operate in a very different context from the preachers in Acts. The closest parallel to our own situation is Paul’s encounter with paganism in Acts 17. In modern western culture, few have any knowledge of the biblical background assumed in the apostolic preaching to the Jews. But those who wish to communicate the gospel to our own generation would do well to recover and apply those same perspectives, even as Paul does embryonically in Acts 17.”⁵⁸⁷

As indicated in 1.3, a number of contemporary apologists would agree with Peterson and thus consider Acts 17:16-34 – at least to some extent – as relevant and applicable for apologetics in the modern secular and pluralistic world.⁵⁸⁸

This chapter critically assesses the use of Acts 17:16-34 by two significant contemporary apologists in relation to a specific contemporary challenge. The aim is not just to assess to what extent these two apologists appreciate and apply the elements outlined in 5.4.2, but also critically to compare Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model ‘then’ and ‘now’.

⁵⁸⁷ Peterson 1998b:55.

⁵⁸⁸ One significant *early* example would be W. Smith. He applied his exegetical understanding of Acts 17:16-34 (see 5.2.2.2) to the mid-twentieth century context in a major discussion on a) ‘the creation of the world by God [as] the apologetic for this era of scientific emphasis’, b) ‘the resurrection of Christ from the dead [as] the apologetic for an age demanding historical certitude’, and c) ‘a righteous judgment to come [as] the apologetic for this time of disappearing ethical standards’. (See Smith 1981:203-466; see also Giertz 1966.)

Some of the most developed uses of Acts 17:16-34 in more *recent* contributions to apologetics are found in: Carson 1996b:496-505; Cook 1996:2-7, 171-174; Charles 1995; DiCello 2001a; DiCello 2001b; Gustavsson 1997: 222-233; McGrath, A. 1998c; and Dahle 1998. Key suggestions for contemporary apologetics on the basis of Acts 17 are also found in: Brosché 1993; Clark & Geisler 1990:7; Guinness 1994b:350,358; Hicks 1995; Johansson 1986:26-28,82; Mayers 1984:164-171; Mæland 1985:32; McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:77-80; Netland 1991a:57; Prior, K. 1995:176-182; Proctor 1992; and Söderlund 1991. Paul’s approach in Acts 17:16-34 are used to legitimize various apologetic approaches (or ‘schools’) in: Frame 1987:367-368; Montgomery 1978:36-42; and Thornton 1986. References to Acts 17:16-34 are also found in e.g. Craig 1984:23; Dyrness 1983:25; Geisler 1999:39; McGrath, A. 1992a:49; and Moore 1989:28-29.

Before outlining the *format* of this critical dialogue (6.1.4), this introductory section identifies what a number of apologists consider as *a major contemporary challenge* (6.1.2), and selects *two significant contemporary apologists*, who have responded to this specific challenge, at least to some extent, by applying Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model (6.1.3).

6.1.2 Selecting postmodernism as a key contemporary challenge

This thesis assumes that Christian apologetics responds to relevant questions, objections and alternatives (see 1.2.2). It was indicated in 5.4.2.3 that non-Christian worldviews (i.e. ‘alternatives’) often tend to affect questions and objections to Christian truth claims. This would imply that a contextual understanding of significant alternative belief-systems is crucial for the apologist. If so, contemporary apologists need to be aware of and understand influential present-day alternative worldviews.

A number of Christian theologians and apologists claim that *postmodernism* constitutes a major contemporary ‘worldview challenge’ to Christian truth claims.⁵⁸⁹ Thiselton’s assessment seems to be representative for many of these Christian authors:

“Nietzsche and Foucault, among others, argue that claims to truth often represent disguised attempts to legitimate uses of power... With the rise of

⁵⁸⁹ See e.g. Allen, D. 1989; Bartolomew 1997; Burson & Walls 1998:17-19; Carson 1996b; Clayton et al 1999; Coffey 1996; Cook 1996:9-47; Cooper 1993; Foshaugen 1998; Grenz 1996; Groothuis 2000; Guinness 2000; Gustavsson 1997:14-26; Henriksen 1999; Hicks 1995; Hinkson & Ganssle 2000; Ingraffia 1995; McGrath, A. 1996:163-200; McGrath, G. 1995b; Phillips & Okholm 1995; Reid, J. et al 1996; Sire 1997; Thiselton 1995; Veith 1994; and Zacharias 2000a.

postmodern notions of the self, of language and meaning, and of society. this issue has become perhaps a more far-reaching cause for disbelief about claims to truth on the part of Christian theology than older, more tired appeals to materialist world-views as monolithic responses of secular modernity.”⁵⁹⁰

Thiselton claims further that the alleged shift from the attitudes of ‘modernity’ to those of postmodernism represents one of “the major intellectual debates of today”.⁵⁹¹ Accordingly, Lyon in *Postmodernity* describes postmodernism as “the new but paradoxical cultural paradigm”⁵⁹² whereas Taylor and Winkist in the recent *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* describe it as a “critical concept that is so much a part of our intellectual and cultural context”⁵⁹³.

The *precise* meaning of ‘postmodern’ as a concept seems unclear.⁵⁹⁴ It seems widely agreed, however, that it usually refers (in various ways) “to the exhaustion – but not necessarily to the demise – of modernity”⁵⁹⁵. Critics have analysed this ‘exhaustion of

⁵⁹⁰ Thiselton 1995:ix. Maltby provides a somewhat parallel description of postmodern philosophy in *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*: “Postmodern critique, which emerged in the 1960s, is chiefly a neo-Nietzschean variant of the practice of contesting the authority of forms of knowledge derived from Enlightenment philosophy. Its goal is to delegitimize these institutional orders of knowledge by exposing the contingent nature of their authority and the oppressive power relations inscribed within them.” (Maltby 2001:302)

⁵⁹¹ Thiselton 1995:8-9.

⁵⁹² Lyon 1999:91. This section (6.1.2) is dependent on Lyon 1999, which is “a good and accessible introduction, charting the lineage of the concept of postmodernity as idea, critique, cultural experience and social condition, with a broad range of cultural references” (Woods 1999:260; Woods refers to the first edition of Lyon’s widely acclaimed work from 1994).

⁵⁹³ Taylor & Winkist 2001: xiii.

⁵⁹⁴ See e.g. Sampson 1994; Lyon 1999:6-24; Thiselton 2000; and Taylor & Winkist 2001. The two latter authors claim that it is “the on-going, irresolvable dispute over the precise meaning of the term and its application that makes research in this area interesting and dynamic” (Taylor & Winkist 2001:xiii). However, “simplifying to the extreme”, says Lyotard, “I define *postmodern* as incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984:xxiv).

⁵⁹⁵ Lyon 1999:9.

modernity' both in social and cultural terms.⁵⁹⁶ *As a challenge to Christian apologetics, however, the cultural – or intellectual – aspects are usually considered as most significant.*⁵⁹⁷

“‘Postmodernism’, refers here to cultural and intellectual phenomena, to the production, consumption and distribution of symbolic goods. Intellectually, one example is the forsaking of ‘foundationalism’, the view that science is built on a firm base of observable facts, in the philosophy of science. This escalated into the so-called ‘science wars’ of the 1990’s. Beyond this, postmodernism questions all the key commitments of the European Enlightenment. As Gary Woller says, ‘postmodernism is about deposing the trinity of the Enlightenment – reason, nature and progress – which presumably triumphed over the earlier Trinity’. But in everyday life, the postmodern may be seen in the blurring of boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture; the collapse of hierarchies of knowledge, taste and opinions; and the interest in the local rather than the universal. If science is soft, its authority is dethroned. ‘Learn from Las Vegas’ (or from natives, or nature) becomes the slogan. Beyond this lies the loss of ‘logocentrism’ in the

⁵⁹⁶ Lyon makes a tentative, but helpful, analytical distinction between “postmodernism, when the accent is on the cultural, and postmodernity, when the emphasis is on the social” (Lyon 1999:9). He adds: “In the end, however, postmodernism cannot be understood without postmodernity, any more than the cultural makes sense without the social and vice versa.” (Lyon 1999:10).

⁵⁹⁷ *It would thus be a different kind of thesis if this chapter included a discussion on the social aspects of postmodernity. It seems appropriate, though, to include Lyon’s instructive summary of these crucial social ‘postmodern’ dimensions: “‘Postmodernity’, on the other hand, while still concentrating on the exhaustion of modernity, has to do with putative social changes. Certain features of modernity are being inflated, and by contrast shrink others into insignificance, to yield new social configurations. While still recognizable to those familiar with modernity, the reshaped conditions call for reappraisal. The old organizational thrust of modernity, argues one group, is jeopardized by the rampant differentiation and fragmentation of the present. Either a new kind of society is coming into being, whose contours can already be perceived dimly (Zygmunt Bauman’s view), or a new stage of capitalism is being inaugurated (David Harvey’s position). In both cases, previous modes of social analysis and political practice are called into question, as power balances shift and ties are unbound and re-bound. And in both cases, two issues are crucial: the prominence of new information and communication technologies, facilitating further extensions of social relationships such as globalization; and consumerism, perhaps eclipsing the conventional centrality of production.” (Lyon 1999:10; see also Lyon 2000)*

proliferation of discourses; the printed book and the TV screen, word and image, text and figure.”⁵⁹⁸

Accordingly, W. Welsch emphasizes plurality or pluralism as the central postmodern concept⁵⁹⁹, whether the focus is on the end of metanarratives, the deconstruction of truth, a deconstructed and decentred self, decentred meaning, *or* conflicting communities, traditions and rationalities.

Many Christian apologists would thus claim that such intellectual and cultural phenomena, as encapsulated in philosophical⁶⁰⁰ and popular⁶⁰¹ postmodernism⁶⁰², constitute a major challenge to contemporary apologetics.

⁵⁹⁸ Lyon 1999:10. The quote is from G. Woller (ed.), *Public Administration and Postmodernism*, special issue of *American Behavioral Scientist*, 41:1, 1997, p. 9.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Welsch 1991:xv,4ff. See also Henriksen 1997:20-21.

⁶⁰⁰ Sire claims that *philosophical postmodernism* – as prefigured by Friedrich Nietzsche and propounded by contemporary philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard and Richard Rorty – can be summarized in the following propositions: “1. The first question postmodernism addresses, is not what is there or how we know what is there but how language functions to construct meaning itself. In other words, there has been a shift in ‘first things’ from being to knowing to constructing meaning... 2. The truth about the reality itself is forever hidden from us. All we can do is tell stories... 3. All narratives mask a play for power. Any one narrative used as a metanarrative is oppressive... 4. Human beings make themselves who they are by the languages they construct about themselves... 5. Ethics, like knowledge, is a linguistic construct. Social good is whatever society takes it to be... 6. The cutting edge of culture is literary theory...” (Sire 1997:175-184; see also Lundin 1995).

⁶⁰¹ Cook provides a tentative summary of *popular postmodernism*: “Postmodernism moves beyond the ‘modern’, scientifically based view of the world by blending a *scepticism* about technology, objectivity, absolutes, and total explanations with a *stress* on image and appearance, personal interpretation, pleasure and the exploration of every spiritual and material perspective.” (Cook 1996:9; italics added) It may be, at least to some extent, that such “postmodernism in general culture is the effect of the trickle down from postmodern theory” (Hinkson & Ganssle 2000:68). *Popular postmodernism*, as defined by Cook above, may also include phenomena such as *New Age religiosity* (cf. also Drane 2000:258 and Lyon 2000:92,94).

⁶⁰² ‘Philosophical postmodernism’ and ‘popular postmodernism’ are the present author’s terms.

This chapter, however, does not offer a first-hand analysis and critique of philosophical and popular postmodernism as such, but engages with two contemporary apologists' most significant writings on apologetics, Acts 17:16-34 and the challenge of postmodernism.

6.1.3 Selecting McGrath and Carson as two key contemporary apologists

This chapter engages critically with the views of two influential contemporary theologians, Alister E. McGrath and Donald A. Carson.⁶⁰³ *These two apologists are among the very few contemporary theologians who have written substantially both on apologetics in general and on postmodernism as a challenge to contemporary apologetics, as well as specifically on Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model.*⁶⁰⁴

Furthermore, the selection of two contemporary theologians with a combined academic and popular involvement in apologetics⁶⁰⁵ reflects the combined emphasis in this thesis on the 'science' *and* the 'art' of apologetics, whereas the selection of one historical-systematic

⁶⁰³ Alister E. McGrath is Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University and a prominent British Anglican evangelical (with the major scholarly contributions in the areas of Reformation history and theology), whereas Donald A. Carson is Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity International University (Deerfield, Illinois) and a prominent American Baptist evangelical (with the major scholarly contributions in the areas of New Testament Greek and exegesis). It should be noted that the selection of two *evangelical* apologists reflects a) a traditional emphasis on Scripture in evangelical theology and b) that "one of evangelicalism's most significant areas of theological activity is the field of apologetics" (McGrath, A. 1997b:334).

⁶⁰⁴ It should be added that McGrath and Carson also share a common interest in and concern for 'spirituality'; see esp. McGrath, A. 1992c; McGrath, A. 1999a; McGrath, A. 1999b; Carson 1992; Carson 1996b:555-569; Carson 1998a; Carson 1999. This topic, however, is outside the scope of this thesis.

⁶⁰⁵ These two authors' popular involvement in apologetics is evident from their writings: see e.g. McGrath, A. 1994b:100 and Carson 1996b:9-10.

theologian (McGrath) and one biblical theologian (Carson) reflects the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis.

These two authors' primary texts on apologetics, Acts 17:16-34 and the challenge of postmodernism are as follows:

a) Alister E. McGrath published a widely influential textbook on apologetics in 1992, *Bridge-building*, where Acts 17:16-34 was referred to in passing and postmodernism was treated briefly.⁶⁰⁶ The concept of bridgebuilding was popularized in *Springboard for Faith* (co-authored in 1993 with M. Green).⁶⁰⁷ In *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (1996), the critical interaction with postmodernism was further developed.⁶⁰⁸ McGrath published a significant series of four articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (in 1998) on "Biblical models for apologetics" in the Book of Acts (which included an article on Acts 17:16-34⁶⁰⁹). His popular apologetic *The Unknown God: Searching for Spiritual Fulfillment* (1999) is also crucial.⁶¹⁰

b) Donald A. Carson published the bestseller *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* in 1996, which is a major critique of postmodernism. This influential study also includes significant material on apologetics and on Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic

⁶⁰⁶ McGrath, A. 1992a.

⁶⁰⁷ McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993.

⁶⁰⁸ McGrath, A. 1996.

⁶⁰⁹ McGrath, A. 1998c; see also McGrath, A. 1998f.

⁶¹⁰ McGrath, A. 1999f.

model.⁶¹¹ The popular *Letters Along the Way: A Novel of the Christian Life* (co-authored with J. D. Woodbridge in 1993)⁶¹², the articles “Preaching that understands the world” (1995)⁶¹³ and “Athens Revisited” (2000)⁶¹⁴, and the daily devotional guides *For the Love of God* (published in two volumes in 1998 and 1999)⁶¹⁵ also include key material.

6.1.4 Introducing the format of this chapter

The *first* major section (6.2) is a comparative analysis and critique of McGrath's and Carson's views on a) apologetics, b) Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics, and c) postmodernism as a challenge to contemporary apologetics. The *second* major section (6.3) is a critical review of McGrath and Carson's applications of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model in relation to the postmodern challenge. The *final* section (6.4) contains a critical comparison between the original model ('then') and these contemporary applications of the model ('now'). This leads to a tentative answer to the second major research question (regarding the validity and relevance of Acts 17:16-34 to contemporary apologetics; see 1.5.2).

⁶¹¹ Carson 1996b.

⁶¹² Carson & Woodbridge 1993.

⁶¹³ Carson 1995b.

⁶¹⁴ Carson 2000a. See also Carson 1998b.

⁶¹⁵ Carson 1998a and Carson 1999. These two devotional volumes lack page numbers. Any references, therefore, will have to be to the assigned dates for the daily devotions (e.g. Jan 1).

6.2 A Common Apologetic Base and a Common Apologetic Challenge

6.2.1 McGrath and Carson on apologetics: An analysis and a critique

This section presents a comparative analysis and critique of Alister E. McGrath and Donald A. Carson's a) definitions of apologetics (including their descriptions of the apologetic tasks)⁶¹⁶, b) interactions with major apologetic approaches⁶¹⁷, and c) views on the relevance and role of biblical material in apologetics.

⁶¹⁶ See also the background material in 1.2.

⁶¹⁷ In a recent helpful – but tentative – taxonomy, Cowan identifies **five major argumentative strategies in contemporary apologetics** (see Cowan 2000:14-20; see also a similar taxonomy in Geisler 1999:41-44 and different taxonomies in Ramm 1962 and Lewis, G. 1990):

1. *'The classical method'* is usually considered to have two foci (or two phases): *first*, arguments for Christian theism from natural theology, and *secondly*, historical evidence for the Christian faith. Key contemporary examples are: Craig in Cowan 2000:26-55; Craig 1994; Geisler 1976; Davis 1993; Davis 1997; and Swinburne 1979. 2. *'The evidential method'* is usually considered to be a 'one-step'-approach with a primary focus on historical evidence in constructing an argument for the Christian faith. Key contemporary examples are: Habermas in Cowan 2000:92-121; Habermas 1980; Montgomery 1975; Montgomery 1978; and Pannenberg 1968. 3. *'The cumulative case method'* is usually considered to be "an informal argument that pieces together several lines or types of data into a sort of hypothesis or theory that comprehensively explains that data and does so better than any other alternative hypothesis" (Cowan 2000:18). Key contemporary examples are: Feinberg in Cowan 2000:148-172; Evans 1982; Evans 1996; Lewis, G. 1990; and Mitchell 1981. 4. *'The presuppositional method'* is usually considered to be an approach where arguments and evidence for Christian theism are presented while presupposing the truth of the Christian premises, since it is argued 'transcendentally' that "all meaning and thought, indeed every fact logically presupposes the God of the Scriptures" (Cowan 2000:19). Key contemporary examples are: Frame in Cowan 2000:208-231; Frame 1994; and van Til 1969. 5. *'The reformed epistemology method'* is usually considered to be an approach where the focus is on negative (or defensive) apologetics, since it is argued, "that belief in God does not require the support of evidence or argument to be rational" (Cowan 2000:20). Key contemporary examples are: Clark, K. in Cowan 2000:266-284; Plantinga 1983; and Alston 1989.

As shown below, McGrath and Carson critically interact with four of these five argumentative strategies, only leaving 'the cumulative case method' aside.

6.2.1.1 McGrath on apologetics

1. Alister McGrath has written extensively on apologetics. In *Bridge-building*, he defines Christian apologetics as “an *apologia* for the Christian faith – a presentation and defence of its claims to truth and relevance in the great market-place of ideas”⁶¹⁸. A slightly different definition is provided in the more recent ‘Glossary of Terms’, where McGrath defines apologetics as “the area of Christian theology which focuses on the defence of the Christian faith, particularly through the rational justification of Christian beliefs and doctrines”.⁶¹⁹ In his earlier *Bampton Lectures*, McGrath suggested that one of the major functions of doctrine is to make truth claims,⁶²⁰ which means that the latter definition above could be taken as implicitly denoting *apologetics* as ‘the rational justification of truth claims’.

McGrath considers this apologetic task imperative both in relation to non-Christians and Christians. a) In relation to non-Christians, McGrath defines apologetics as pre-

⁶¹⁸ McGrath, A. 1992a:9. Thus, “apologetics is basically about affirming the truth and the attraction of the gospel.” (McGrath, A. 1999e:70). Elsewhere, he presents a complementary definition: “A good working definition of apologetics would be ‘the attempt to create an intellectual climate favourable to Christian faith’, or ‘a concern to enhance the public plausibility of the gospel’.” (McGrath, A. 1994b:102) In a recent work, apologetics is defined as “the reasoned defence and justification of the Christian faith against its critics” (McGrath, A. 2001a:4).

⁶¹⁹ McGrath, A. 1997b:426. See also McGrath, A. 1999a:179 and McGrath, A. 2001a:754. In another recent work, though, due to a growing critique of ‘foundationalism’, McGrath expresses hesitation towards an uncritical use of terms such as ‘rational’ and ‘rationality’. (McGrath, A. 1998e:14).

⁶²⁰ McGrath, A. 1997a:37. McGrath suggests that doctrine a) functions as a social demarcator, b) is generated by and subsequently interprets the Christian narrative, c) interprets experience, and d) makes truth claims. (McGrath, A. 1997a:37-80) His emphasis on “the wonderful coherence of Christian doctrine” (McGrath, A. 1999b:3; cf. also McGrath, A. 2001b:6 and the title of McGrath,

evangelism, thus clearing the ground for evangelism⁶²¹: “Apologetics stresses the reasonableness and attractiveness of the Christian faith; evangelism makes the offer of that faith.”⁶²² *Bridgebuilding* and *Springboard for Faith* are written to equip Christians for this pre-evangelistic task, whereas *The Unknown God* is intended as pre-evangelism and evangelism *per se*. b) In relation to Christians, McGrath suggests that apologetics should be “part of the regular diet of faith, if that faith is to grow”⁶²³. This implies that apologetics is related to key areas such as preaching, teaching, and writing. McGrath argues thus in *Bridge-building* for the incorporation of apologetic material “into the regular preaching rhythm of the church”⁶²⁴. He also points out that his own work “as a scholar, speaker and writer has centred on the defence of the intellectual foundations of the gospel”⁶²⁵.

A. 1996) should also be noticed.

⁶²¹ Already in *The Genesis of Doctrine* (which contained his 1990 *Bampton Lectures* on doctrinal criticism), McGrath asserted that apologetics, “understood as the explanation of Christian ideas to an audience drawn from outside the community of faith, is clearly of continuing importance as part of a broader evangelistic strategy” (McGrath, A. 1997a:199). This definition of apologetics as pre-evangelism corresponds to his publication of the popular *Explaining Your Faith Without Losing Your Friends* in 1988. See also McGrath, A. 1999e:70 and McGrath, A. 2000b:24.

⁶²² McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:17. See also McGrath, A. 1992a:9.

⁶²³ McGrath, A. 1992a:243; see also McGrath, A. 1990.

⁶²⁴ McGrath claims that apologetics should inform regular preaching in three key areas: “The preacher must *anticipate* the difficulties which will be experienced by ordinary Christians, and indicate how they may be handled. The sermon must *explain* basic ideas and concepts of the Christian faith, in order that Christian congregations can achieve new depths of understanding. And finally, the sermon must *reassure* Christians of the credentials of their faith.” (McGrath, A. 1992a:243) McGrath’s co-author, M. Green, claims in *Springboard for Faith*, that apologetics should be integrated in the teaching of both local churches and theological colleges.

⁶²⁵ McGrath, A. 1994b:100.

McGrath's influential 1992 textbook, with the significant title *Bridgebuilding*, seems largely to have been shaped by *historical and systematic theology*.⁶²⁶ His aim was, on this theological basis⁶²⁷, to develop apologetics, both as 'science' and as 'art'. This key notion of bridgebuilding

“implies a gap, a gulf fixed between two sides of a canyon. The two sides will remain permanently isolated, unless the gap can be bridged. Effective Christian apologetics aims to locate the points at which there exists a separation between the gospel and individuals and communities within the world, and to identify the best points at which to build bridges, in order that contact may be established. The nature and location of those gaps varies from one culture and one individual to another, as do the sites and types of the bridges, which need to be built. And the Christian apologist will discover, with delight, that God has already laid the foundations for those bridges in the world and in the human heart; our responsibility is to build upon those foundations, and make the necessary connections.”⁶²⁸

On the basis of his definition of apologetics and this key notion of bridgebuilding,

McGrath identifies a number of *crucial tasks* for the apologist: a) Apologetics must be

“receptor-orientated”⁶²⁹, and therefore apologists should know the experiential world of an

⁶²⁶ McGrath claims that ‘creative’ and ‘effective’ apologetics must be properly *informed by (systematic) theology* in two distinctive ways: “First, it provides the apologist with a network of beliefs and doctrines which enable him or her to detect weaknesses in alternative worldviews and to identify the strengths of the Christian proclamation... [Second, theology] provides an analytical framework by which the apologist may bring the full resources of the gospel to bear on the situation in hand.” (McGrath, A. 1992a:41; see also McGrath, A. 1998a:6-7 and McGrath, A. 2000b:24-25.)

⁶²⁷ McGrath claims that significant theological expressions of apologetics as bridge-building are found a) historically in classical evangelical thought, such as Calvin’s “views on the created order as a point of contact for divine revelation” (McGrath, A. 1992a:36), and b) theologically in the doctrines of creation and redemption (McGrath, A. 1992a:18-25).

⁶²⁸ McGrath, A. 1992a:17.

⁶²⁹ McGrath, A. 1992a:43.

audience.⁶³⁰ b) Apologists should know the identity and potential of God-given key points of contact for the Christian gospel. McGrath identifies six such significant points of contact: a sense of unsatisfied longing, human rationality, the ordering of the world, human morality, existential anxiety and alienation, and awareness of finitude and mortality.⁶³¹ c) Apologists should be able to identify and answer various intellectual objections to the Christian faith in an audience. McGrath identifies six key intellectual barriers to faith in the contemporary context⁶³²: the projection theory (God as a wish-fulfilment)⁶³³, the problem of suffering⁶³⁴, religious pluralism and relativism⁶³⁵, the credibility of the historicity of the Resurrection, the credibility of the divinity of Christ, and the credibility of the Christian views of sin and salvation.⁶³⁶ d) Apologists should be able to challenge⁶³⁷ non-Christian worldviews in a given audience. McGrath identifies six significant contemporary rivals to the Christian faith⁶³⁸: Enlightenment rationalism, Marxism, scientific materialism⁶³⁹, feminism, postmodernism⁶⁴⁰, and the New Age.

⁶³⁰ McGrath, A. 1992a:45-50.

⁶³¹ McGrath, A. 1992a:51-75. Some of these themes are central in McGrath's writings: a) on 'a sense of unsatisfied longing' and 'existential anxiety and alienation', see e.g. McGrath, A. 1997c:420-436 and McGrath, A. 1999f:7-17; b) on 'human rationality and 'the ordering of the world', see e.g. McGrath, A. 1998c:262-265 (on Acts 17), McGrath, A. 1998e and McGrath, A. 1999c:134-139.

⁶³² McGrath, A. 1992a:95-99,132-187.

⁶³³ See also McGrath, A. 1999f:18-25.

⁶³⁴ See McGrath, A. 2000d.

⁶³⁵ On Christian truth-claims and relativism, see esp. McGrath, A. 1997a:72-102.

⁶³⁶ For the three latter topics, see esp. McGrath, A. 1997c.

⁶³⁷ McGrath writes elsewhere, however, about the "non-confrontational" character of apologetics. (McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:18)

⁶³⁸ McGrath, A. 1992a:188-238.

⁶³⁹ For an in-depth discussion on justification procedures in (natural) science and theology, see McGrath, A. 1998e and McGrath, A. 1999c.

2. In developing his apologetics, McGrath critically interacts with and combines major apologetic approaches. ‘*Classical apologetics*’, in the shape of Aquinas, is largely positively treated. McGrath claims that, through the ‘Five Ways’, “Aquinas was not out to prove the existence of God by rational argument, but to provide a rational defence of an already existing faith in God”⁶⁴¹. Aquinas is criticized, however, for his appeal to a universal rationality⁶⁴², since frameworks of rationality should be seen, not as universal, but as “socially and historically located”⁶⁴³. ‘*Historical evidentialism*’, McGrath argues, “fulfils a vital and central function in the armoury of the Christian apologist”⁶⁴⁴, e.g. as represented by W. Pannenberg’s seminal argument for the historicity of the Resurrection⁶⁴⁵. McGrath claims, however, that evidentialism “tends to imply that facts anchor meaning, whereas the reverse appears to hold true”⁶⁴⁶. The apologist, therefore, needs “to establish not just what has happened, but how that event should be interpreted”.⁶⁴⁷ ‘*Presuppositional apologetics*’ is criticized for its denial of any points of

⁶⁴⁰ For McGrath’s apologetic interaction with postmodernism, see further 6.2.3.1.

⁶⁴¹ McGrath, A. 1992a:60. See also McGrath, A. 1992a:85-86 and McGrath, A. 1999c:88-110. It is also a positive reference to “the excellent study of R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner and Arthur Lindsley *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defence of the Christian Faith as a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*” in McGrath, A. 1992a:267.

⁶⁴² McGrath, A. 1992a:86.

⁶⁴³ McGrath, A. 1997a:90.

⁶⁴⁴ McGrath, A. 1992a:83

⁶⁴⁵ See McGrath, A. 1992a:164-165; McGrath, A. 1994a:332-334 and McGrath, A. 1994c:192-194. McGrath points out that “many observers sense that Pannenberg has made it theologically respectable to speak once more of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as an historical event” (McGrath, A. 1994c:194; see also Pannenberg 1968).

⁶⁴⁶ McGrath, A. 1992a:83.

⁶⁴⁷ McGrath, A. 1992a:84. A brief defence of the historicity of the Resurrection is given in McGrath, A. 1992:160-165; see also McGrath, A. 1997b:102-105 and McGrath, A. 1998b:136-137.

contact or ‘common ground’.⁶⁴⁸ McGrath credits C. van Til, however, for having “shown the necessity of grounding apologetics upon a solid theological foundation”,⁶⁴⁹ but claims that neither C. van Til nor K. Barth have succeeded “in undermining the foundations which give theological justification to a limited and informed appeal to nature”.⁶⁵⁰ McGrath refers with assent to the ‘*Reformed epistemological*’ rejection of ‘classical foundationalism’,⁶⁵¹ but disagrees with A. Plantinga’s objection to natural theology (which, according to McGrath, is based on a belief that natural theology intends to *prove* the existence of God). McGrath claims, however, that natural theology “is to be understood as a demonstration, from the standpoint of faith, of the consonance between that faith and the structures of the world”⁶⁵². Natural theology, then, should be used in order to affirm ‘the epistemic permission’ (rather than ‘the epistemic obligation’) of a (Christian) theistic worldview.⁶⁵³

*It seems then, as if McGrath does not explicitly identify with any of these apologetic traditions, but his aim is rather “to supplement them”*⁶⁵⁴. He characterizes his own

⁶⁴⁸ See McGrath, A. 1992a:36-41,86-89.

⁶⁴⁹ McGrath, A. 1992a:41. See also McGrath, A. 2000b:24.

⁶⁵⁰ McGrath, A. 1992a:39.

⁶⁵¹ McGrath, A. 1998e:11-14; see also McGrath, A. 1996:172 and Plantinga 1983. McGrath’s appropriation of central insights from *Reformed epistemology* is also found in a more recent statement: “Beliefs systems possess their own integrities, which may not be evaluated by others as if there were some privileged position from which all may be judged.” (McGrath, A. 2000b:34)

⁶⁵² McGrath, A. 1998e:107-108. See also McGrath, A. 1999c:133-134.

⁶⁵³ See McGrath, A. 1992a:85-86 and McGrath, A. 1998e:108,114. It should be noticed that McGrath does not use the expressions ‘epistemic permission’ and ‘epistemic obligation’.

⁶⁵⁴ McGrath, A. 1992a:13.

apologetics a '*creative approach*', "based upon the notion of the point of contact"⁶⁵⁵ (see above) and making "a judicious use of an arsenal of apologetic techniques"⁶⁵⁶. *McGrath's apologetic emphasis, however, seems to be more on demonstrating the coherence and the attractiveness of Christian beliefs⁶⁵⁷ than on the actual presentation and defence of theistic arguments⁶⁵⁸ and historical evidence.*

3. McGrath did not engage in any extended discussion on the relevance and role of biblical material in apologetics in his 1992 textbook, although there are a few illustrations from Scripture, including some key observations on Acts 17:16-34.⁶⁵⁹ In 1998, however, McGrath explicitly added biblical material to his primary theological resources for the apologetic tasks. Significantly, he argues (in a series of articles entitled "Biblical models for apologetics") that insufficient attention has been given in contemporary apologetics to the various models in the Book of Acts.

"Here is material that is explicitly apologetic in nature. In a series of addresses and incidents Paul and others directly interacted with the ideas and concerns of a number of major social groups. As the narrative of Acts (and the history of the early church) makes clear, each of these groups came to be represented in the early church. The apologetic approaches illustrated in Acts led to conversions within each of these groups. These early apologetic approaches offer insights into authentically biblical methods of

⁶⁵⁵ McGrath, A. 1992a:87.

⁶⁵⁶ McGrath, A. 1992a:39.

⁶⁵⁷ See e.g. McGrath, A. 1998a:5.

⁶⁵⁸ For a brief presentation of philosophical arguments for the existence of God, see McGrath, A. 1999c:88-102. It should also be noted that an apologetic for the existence and personal nature of God is presented in McGrath, A. 1997c:125-183.

⁶⁵⁹ See McGrath, A. 1992a:47-50. He also refers in passing (in footnote 45) to the important study by F.F. Bruce on *The Defence of the Gospel in the New Testament* (Bruce 1977; see McGrath, A. 1992a:269), but this does not seem to have influenced his overall approach.

apologetics, as well as strategies for interacting with specific groups that were of major importance to the development of the early church. The same issues remain as relevant today as they did at the dawn of the Christian era."⁶⁶⁰

For McGrath, then, this leads to a discussion of Paul's approach in Athens as a key apologetic model in Acts (see further 6.2.2.1).

This analysis has shown that McGrath a) defines apologetics as a rational justification of Christian beliefs and doctrines (including an affirmation and defence of their claims to relevance and attractiveness) for both non-Christians and Christians, b) critically combines insights from various apologetic traditions, but with an emphasis on material showing the coherence and attractiveness of Christian beliefs (especially through the use of significant 'points of contact'), and c) recently has added apologetic models in the Book of Acts, with an emphasis on Acts 17:16-34, to his primary theological resources for apologetics.

6.2.1.2 Carson on apologetics

1. Donald Carson does not present an explicit definition of apologetics. He claims, however, that the apologetic enterprise includes "rational arguments"⁶⁶¹ and "the use of the theistic proofs and historical evidence for the resurrection"⁶⁶². The role of apologetics,

⁶⁶⁰ McGrath, A. 1998a:10.

⁶⁶¹ Carson & Woodbridge 1993:150.

⁶⁶² Carson & Woodbridge 1993:150.

according to Carson, is both to sustain the beliefs of Christians⁶⁶³ and to present evidence to non-Christians.⁶⁶⁴ Elsewhere, he argues that the apostolic injunction in 1 Pet. 3:15 should lead to a commitment among Christians “to grow in apologetic competence”⁶⁶⁵.

Furthermore, Carson emphasizes simultaneously the necessity of and the limitation of “an intellectually responsible and biblically faithful apologetic”⁶⁶⁶.

2. In his endeavour to be ‘intellectually responsible’, Carson critically interacts with major apologetic approaches, as found in contributions from some significant contemporary apologists. He refers thus with critical approval to ‘*Reformed epistemologist*’ A. Plantinga’s argument “that belief in God is ‘properly basic’ (i.e., that it does not need some other foundation to be considered rational”⁶⁶⁷), but claims that this approach must be complemented with an emphasis on ‘epistemic obligation’, as argued by H. Netland.⁶⁶⁸ Carson emphasizes, with *evidentialism*,⁶⁶⁹ over against ‘Reformed epistemology’, that biblical passages such as 1 Cor. 15:3-15 and Acts 17:2-3 seem “to provide us with Biblical

⁶⁶³ This includes arguments in support of beliefs “in the divinity of Christ or in the authority of the Bible” (Carson & Woodbridge 1993:150). It should also be added that Carson has written two significant studies for Christians a) on suffering and evil (Carson 1990) and b) on divine sovereignty and human responsibility (Carson 1994).

⁶⁶⁴ See e.g. Carson & Woodbridge 1993:150-156; where the example is evidence about the uniqueness of Christ in a world of religious pluralism.

⁶⁶⁵ Carson 1999 (on May 16).

⁶⁶⁶ Carson 1996b:96.

⁶⁶⁷ Carson 1996b:186. Carson describes this as “the non-foundational foundationalism of Alvin Plantinga” (Carson 1996b:95). See Plantinga 1983 and Carson & Woodbridge 1993:153-156.

⁶⁶⁸ Carson 1996b:188. See Netland 1994:102.

⁶⁶⁹ Carson seems to treat ‘evidentialism’ as a form of ‘classical apologetics’ (see Carson 1996b:95).

warrant for some form of evidentiary apologetics”⁶⁷⁰. He expresses an ambiguity, however, towards the role and effect of evidence in apologetics: “From one perspective, God has supplied such ample evidence that men and women are without excuse; from another, the evidence is never such that *in itself* it overcomes our innate self-centeredness, our profound lostness, our deep rebellion.”⁶⁷¹ Carson claims further that, whereas more narrower forms of *presuppositionalism* “do not *justify* the Christian’s worldview over against other competing worldviews”⁶⁷², J. Frame’s work (as a modified presuppositional apologist) “marks the most mature melding of various components of apologetics I have seen so far”⁶⁷³:

“For example, he makes clear that he has no objection to the forceful presentation of evidences in Christian apologetics; what he objects to is the adoption (implicit or otherwise) of the assumption that evidence or reasons are neutral. He does not object to appeals to extrabiblical data in apologetics, but refuses to assign them independent authority to which Scripture must measure up to.”⁶⁷⁴

3. Carson’s focus is on the relevance and role of biblical material in apologetics. Like Frame⁶⁷⁵, Carson emphasizes a ‘biblically faithful’ apologetic⁶⁷⁶. Whereas Frame

⁶⁷⁰ Carson & Woodbridge 1993:151. See also Carson 1996b:508.

⁶⁷¹ Carson & Woodbridge 1993:156. See also Carson 1983:142.

⁶⁷² Carson 1996b:186. Carson describes such narrower forms of presuppositionalism as “fideistic” (Carson 1996b:95).

⁶⁷³ Carson 1996b:188. Carson observes that “one wonders if the classical debates between, say, evidential and presuppositional apologetics, between empiricism and fideism, would look vastly different if they were forced to butt up against a well-articulated analysis of the entailments of the fall and of biblical presentations of God’s rich bounty in providing general, specific, and *personal* revelation to meet our moral and spiritual blindness” (Carson 1993a:54).

⁶⁷⁴ Carson 1996b:187-188.

⁶⁷⁵ See e.g. Frame in Cowan 2000:208.

⁶⁷⁶ Carson claims that a biblically faithful apologetic is possible since “the kerygma has

established a biblical worldview in the *atemporal* framework of systematic theology⁶⁷⁷. Carson claims that a wiser and more strategic approach in apologetics would be to establish a biblical worldview within the framework of the Bible's plot-line (i.e. according to biblical theology⁶⁷⁸): "One is simultaneously setting forth a structure of thought, and a meta-narrative; one is constructing a worldview, and showing how that worldview is grounded in the Bible itself."⁶⁷⁹ Carson emphasises that this 'biblical storyline' should be spelt out "to Christians and to non-Christians alike – to Christians, to ground them in Scripture, and to non-Christians, as part of our proclamation of the gospel"⁶⁸⁰. He claims that this approach is exemplified, in relation to non-Christians, in Acts 17:16-34 (see further 6.2.2.2).

This analysis has shown that Carson a) implicitly defines apologetics as the presenting of rational arguments and evidence for the truth of Christianity to both Christians and non-Christians, b) critically interacts with various apologetic traditions, but prefers Frame's modified presuppositional approach, and c) suggests that 'the biblical plot-line', e.g. as seen in Acts 17:16-34, should be allowed to shape contemporary apologetics.

content; the good news is definable" (Carson 1996b:507).

⁶⁷⁷ This is how Carson describes the approach in Frame 1994.

⁶⁷⁸ Carson uses the term 'biblical theology' to refer to "the theology of the biblical corpora as God progressively discloses himself, climaxing in the coming of his Son Jesus Christ, and consummating in the new heaven and the new earth. In other words, sequence, history, the passage of time – these are foundational to biblical theology, and relatively minor in systematic theology" (Carson 1996b:502).

⁶⁷⁹ Carson 1996b:502. Carson claims that the biblical storyline provides a basis for the Christian communicator's evaluation of a given cultural context, i.e. "what cultural elements are largely neutral, what are to be opposed and reformed by the gospel, what are the fruit of common

6.2.1.3 Commonalities and differences

McGrath and Carson share common views on apologetics in a number of areas. *First*, their definitions of apologetics seem complementary rather than contradictory.⁶⁸¹ *Secondly*, McGrath and Carson both critique traditional versions of classical apologetics, evidentialism and presuppositionalism as significant but inadequate apologetic strategies. Both authors also acknowledge key insights from the more recent ‘Reformed epistemological’ approach. *Thirdly*, there is a common concern for the integration of biblical material in contemporary apologetics, with a focus on Acts 17:16-34 as a particularly significant text. *Fourthly*, Carson’s emphasis on the primary role of the biblical plotline in the establishment of a Christian worldview (over against a systematic theology approach) seems— to a large extent – to be parallel to McGrath’s claim that the Sola Scriptura principle is "an assertion of the primacy of the foundational scriptural narrative over any framework of conceptualities which it may generate"⁶⁸².

There are also some important differences between McGrath and Carson’s views of apologetics. *First*, whereas McGrath’s work on apologetic theory is both extensive and significant, Carson’s work in this area is much more limited in scope but seems

grace and therefore to be espoused and cherished” (Carson 1995b:152).

⁶⁸⁰ Carson 1996b:194.

⁶⁸¹ The agreement between the two authors on ‘the principle of accommodation’ as a fundamental belief in apologetics should also be noticed. Accordingly, Carson quotes McGrath approvingly: “God is able to communicate with humans through human language. This belief is fundamental, to the point of being axiomatic, to Christian apologetics.” (McGrath, A. 1992a:26; quoted in Carson 1996b:130)

nevertheless significant. *Secondly*, their respective areas of primary expertise – for McGrath historical and systematical theology, and for Carson hermeneutics and biblical exegesis – seem to a large extent to shape their apologetic approach and terminology. *Thirdly*, whereas McGrath does not seem to associate himself explicitly with one specific apologetic tradition, Carson favours a modified presuppositional apologetics (as proposed by Frame).

6.2.1.4 A critique

The understanding of apologetics assumed in this thesis (see 1.2) forms the basis for a brief critique of McGrath and Carson's definitions.

- a) The understanding of apologetics as '*the rational justification of Christian truth claims*' is consistent with McGrath's explicit and Carson's implicit definitions. McGrath's additional emphasis on attractiveness should be included as an essential part of one of the actual criteria for truth (i.e. the test for adequacy and relevance).
- b) Apologetics as an activity '*over against specific questions, objections, and alternatives*' seems consistent with both McGrath and Carson's views of the apologetic task, but neither has integrated this element into their (normative) explicit or implicit definitions of apologetics.

⁶⁸² McGrath, A. 1996:114.

c) Apologetics as having the dual aim of establishing '*the epistemic permission*' and '*the epistemic obligation*' of the Christian faith' is briefly mentioned by Carson (but not developed conceptually or in relation to relevant Scriptural passages), whereas this terminology is absent in McGrath's writings. It seems, though, that – in terms of their argumentative strategies – McGrath's emphasis is on 'epistemic permission' whereas Carson focuses on 'epistemic obligation'. The tension between the notion of 'epistemic obligation' and McGrath's emphasis on the "non-confrontational" character of apologetics⁶⁸³ should also be noticed in this context.

d) Both authors recognize and practise apologetics as intended '*for both Christians and non-Christians*'. These critical observations lead to the conclusion, that there is a large measure of agreement between the assumed definition of apologetics in this thesis and McGrath's explicit and Carson's implicit definitions – with the exception of McGrath's possible hesitance towards the notion of 'epistemic obligation'.

It seems legitimate briefly to assess the two authors' contributions to apologetics; both in light of their critical interactions with major apologetic strategies and their views of the role of biblical material in apologetics.

McGrath's eclectic approach recognizes a number of key insights from various apologetic 'schools', but his many writings seem to lack any independent in-depth presentation and defence of theistic arguments and/or historical evidence (in contrast to other major

⁶⁸³ McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:18. See also McGrath, A. 1992a:128-129

contemporary apologists such as e.g. W. L. Craig, S. T. Davis, G. Habermas, W. Pannenberg, A. Plantinga and R. Swinburne⁶⁸⁴). It should also be added that McGrath's writings up to 1998 lacked any in-depth engagement with the foundation of apologetics in the theology and practice of the New Testament.

*It seems evident, though, that McGrath has made a number of significant contributions to contemporary apologetics, esp. a) the re-introduction of apologetics as a legitimate and significant spiritual discipline in contemporary theology⁶⁸⁵, b) the foundational arguments on the (fourfold) nature of doctrine in *The Genesis of Doctrine* (over against postliberalism⁶⁸⁶, historicism and cultural relativism), c) the creative development of 'points of contact'⁶⁸⁷ – as a basis for claiming the inherent attractiveness and relevance of the Gospel – in *Bridge-building*, d) the in-depth demonstration of the coherence of key Christian beliefs and doctrines, as seen e.g. in *Studies in Doctrine*, and e) the explorations*

⁶⁸⁴ For references to significant works by these authors, see footnote 617.

⁶⁸⁵ As expressed by McGrath recently (when writing on 'theology and spiritual disciplines within contemporary evangelicalism'): "Apologetics is thus much more than the art of communication and persuasion; it is a theological science, undergirded by a rigorous analysis of the nature of the gospel on the one hand and the situation and nature of those to whom it is addressed on the other." (McGrath, A. 2000b:26) It would have been more appropriate, however, to focus on 'the truth claims of the gospel' – as more precise and specific than the much wider 'the nature of the gospel'.

⁶⁸⁶ Sumner's recent claim that even though "McGrath attacked [G.] Lindbeck's position for shirking the questions of history and truth, ... the alternative McGrath offers sounds quite Lindbeckian" (Sumner 2000:433) seems largely unfair.

⁶⁸⁷ In relation to the notion of a 'point of contact', McGrath refers repeatedly in his writings to the Barth-Brunner debate on natural theology (as in McGrath, A. 1992a:24; McGrath, A. 1994c:148-150; and McGrath, A. 1998e:103-104; see also McGrath, A. 1999d:175-194). For an incisive account of this influential debate, see Hart 1999:139-172. On the implications for apologetics, see Holder 2001.

of a dialogue between (natural) theology and (natural) science, especially in *The Foundations of Dialogue in Science & Religion*.

It remains to assess, however, whether McGrath's analysis and application of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics is equally significant (see 6.2.2.1).

Carson's tentative approval of Frame's modified presuppositional approach makes him dependent on the strengths and weaknesses of Frame's position. Whereas Frame allows for the use of theistic arguments and historical evidence, he still holds the traditional presuppositional view that all arguments are circular.⁶⁸⁸ This latter view, however, has been subject to serious criticisms, both as begging the question⁶⁸⁹ and as "based on a confusion between ontology and epistemology"⁶⁹⁰. Carson's selection of Frame's presuppositional approach as a role model is thus at the very least a controversial choice.

Carson's contribution to contemporary apologetics seems largely limited to his significant suggestion in *The Gagging of God* that the biblical storyline should shape the presentation and defence of a Christian worldview; see 6.2.2.2.

⁶⁸⁸ See Frame's contributions in Cowan 2000.

⁶⁸⁹ 'Classical apologist' W.L. Craig, 'evidentialist apologist' G.R. Habermas, 'cumulative case apologist' P.D. Feinberg and 'Reformed epistemology apologist' K.J. Clark all agree in this critique of Frame's presuppositional approach: "As commonly understood, presuppositionalism is guilty of a logical howler: it commits the informal fallacy of *petitio principii*, or begging the question, for it advocates presupposing the truth of Christian theism in order to prove Christian theism" (Craig in Cowan 2000:232).

⁶⁹⁰ Cowan 2000:379, which refers to Craig's critique of Frame in Cowan 2000:315-316. Thus, "if God did not exist, then the causal principle would be false (because the truth and existence of

It remains to assess, however, whether Carson's analysis and application of this key notion in relation to Acts 17:16-34 is equally significant (see 6.2.2.2).

6.2.2 McGrath and Carson on Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics: An analysis and a critique

The previous section (6.2.1) indicated that both McGrath and Carson assigned a significant role to Acts 17:16-34 in apologetics. This section (6.2.2) presents a comparative analysis and critique of McGrath and Carson's understanding of this passage, both exegetically and as apologetics.

6.2.2.1 McGrath on Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics

In his *NIV Bible Commentary* Alister E. McGrath presents his basic exegetical understanding of – what he considers to be Luke's credible account⁶⁹¹ in – Acts 17:16-34:

"After passing through Berea (17:10-14), the group finally arrive in Athens, still widely regarded as the intellectual centre of the ancient world. The city had a reputation for its short-lived interest in the latest ideas and intellectual fashion, and appears to have seen in Paul the source of some exciting new ideas. It is here that Paul delivers his famous address on the Areopagus, or 'Mars Hill'.⁶⁹²

anything is ontologically dependent on God's existence). But, according to Craig, it does not follow from this fact of reality that one's reason or justification for believing in the causal principle is that one believes in God's existence." (Cowan 2000:379)

⁶⁹¹ McGrath considers Luke as the author of Acts (see McGrath, A. 1997b:7,66) and claims that Luke "gives us access to some of Paul's sermons, allowing us to appreciate the way in which he presented the gospel in a variety of different situations" (McGrath, A. 1995b:307).

⁶⁹² Contrary to this reference (and e.g. McGrath, A. 1992a:231 and McGrath, A.

Rather than get caught up in some petty theological arguments, Paul declares that it is common knowledge that there is a creator God, who has authority over men and women. But who is this God? And how may he be known? Having noted an altar in the city dedicated to 'an unknown god', Paul declares that what the Athenians worship as something unknown, he will proclaim⁶⁹³ as someone who can be known. Having thus laid the foundations for the gospel, he develops the basic Christian message of the need for repentance.

The reception accorded to his address is not particularly enthusiastic. Nevertheless, the gospel has now been proclaimed in Athens. ... There is no letter from Paul to the Athenians. It seems that no church was founded in this city."⁶⁹⁴

It seems reasonable to assume that this exegetical understanding constitutes the framework for McGrath's five major claims about Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics.

First, the passage is seen as *a key apologetic model in Acts* (see 6.2.1). It was thus intended as "an object lesson in apologetics"⁶⁹⁵. As such, it has considerable "apologetic potential"⁶⁹⁶.

Secondly, the passage is seen as illustrating the principle that "apologist-evangelists must *know their audiences*"⁶⁹⁷: a) Paul seems to have identified intelligibility as a major

1997b:125,245), the location question is left undecided in McGrath, A. 1998c:260.

⁶⁹³ Elsewhere, McGrath explains 'proclaim' in 17:23 (and a number of other Scriptural passages) as the "proclamation of God's saving activity in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (McGrath, A. 1997c:197).

⁶⁹⁴ McGrath, A. 1995b:323.

⁶⁹⁵ McGrath, A. 1992a:49. The passage is thus referred to as an apologetic model already in McGrath, A. 1992a:49,231,233,283.

⁶⁹⁶ McGrath, A. 1998c:260.

⁶⁹⁷ McGrath, A. 1998d:393; italics added. See also McGrath, A. 1992a:45-50.

challenge in relation to this biblically illiterate audience,⁶⁹⁸ which led to at least two implications: (1) “The basic theme of a living personal God needed to be introduced before the fundamental themes of the gospel could be enunciated.”⁶⁹⁹ (2) Relevant material (see b below), relevant authorities (see c below) and relevant lines of argument (see d and e below) – which carry weight with the audience – were identified and utilized by the apostle.⁷⁰⁰ b) Paul allowed the religious and philosophical curiosity of the Athenians to shape “the contours of his theological exposition”⁷⁰¹. c) Paul “appeals to the authority of Cleanthes, Aratus, and Epimenides...(17:28)”⁷⁰². d) Paul, it is claimed, “showed a clear appreciation of the apologetic potential of Stoic philosophy, portraying the gospel as resonating with central Stoic concerns, while extending the limits of what might be known”.⁷⁰³ e) According to McGrath, Paul argued that Christianity “put a name to the god whose existence ancient philosophy had recognized”⁷⁰⁴. Thus, God is being made known to the Athenians “a) by name and b) in full”⁷⁰⁵.

⁶⁹⁸ McGrath, A. 2000c.

⁶⁹⁹ McGrath, A. 1998c:261.

⁷⁰⁰ McGrath, A. 1998d:393. Elsewhere, it is claimed that Paul “aimed to gain a hearing for the gospel by engaging with ideas and terms which were already familiar to Paul’s audience” (McGrath, A. 1997b:125).

⁷⁰¹ McGrath, A. 1992a:49 and McGrath, A. 1998c:261.

⁷⁰² McGrath, A. 2001a:xi.

⁷⁰³ McGrath, A. 1992a:49 and McGrath, A. 1998c:261.

⁷⁰⁴ McGrath, A. 1997b:245. This (it is claimed elsewhere) is an example of religious experience as a point of contact for the Christian gospel (see below, footnote 706); “in other words, Christianity puts a name to this reality of which we are aware, and opens the way towards a full appreciation of the richness and profundity of the experience of God” (McGrath, A. 1997c:146-147).

⁷⁰⁵ McGrath, A. 2000c.

Thirdly, along with Romans 1-2, the passage is seen as indicating, Paul's *awareness of God-given points of contact within the created order* (see 6.2.1), such as a sense of unsatisfied longing,⁷⁰⁶ human reason, the ordering of the world and the beauty of the world.⁷⁰⁷ McGrath claims thus that Paul "explicitly appealed to the idea of creation as a basis for his apologetic approach"⁷⁰⁸, since the doctrine of creation gives a "theological foundation to the concept of a natural knowledge of God"⁷⁰⁹. Paul used thus "the 'sense of divinity' present in each individual (vv. 28-29) as a powerful apologetic device".⁷¹⁰

Fourthly, having spoken about the importance of creation, Paul "*clinched his argument by an appeal to Jesus' resurrection* (Acts 17:31)"⁷¹¹. Thus, "what the Greeks held to be unknown (v. 23) and possibly unknowable, Paul said was made known through the resurrection of Christ"⁷¹².

⁷⁰⁶ McGrath claims (as indicated above, see footnote 704) that 17:23-24 identifies and utilizes a "point of contact that the gospel of justification addresses. The 'It' we know intuitively to lie through and beyond our quests and hopes discloses himself as a 'You'. We learn that our longings point to something unknown, to *someone*, whom we were longing for...The gospel thus complements and develops such insights by proclaiming that a *person* lies behind and under our personal existence – and more than that: it is possible to *relate* to this person, to the 'You' who lies beyond and behind every human 'I-You' relationship." (McGrath, A. 1997c:435; see also McGrath, A. 1999f, where this notion is developed further.)

⁷⁰⁷ McGrath, A. 1998c:262-265.

⁷⁰⁸ McGrath, A. 1998c:262.

⁷⁰⁹ McGrath, A. 1998c:262.

⁷¹⁰ McGrath, A. 1998c:261; see also McGrath, A. 1992a:49.

⁷¹¹ McGrath, A. 1998c:264; italics added.

⁷¹² McGrath, A. 1998c:261; see also McGrath, A. 1992a:49. It is claimed that Paul also may have appealed, at least implicitly, in connection with his emphasis on the Resurrection, to 'a sense of anxiety' (McGrath, A. 2000c).

Fifthly, the passage “illustrates the New Testament tendency to mingle *kerygma* (preaching) and *apologia* (apologetics) as two aspects of a greater whole”.⁷¹³

For McGrath, then, Acts 17:16-34 is a significant New Testament model of apologetics, since it is a speech – with explicitly apologetic material – to Greek unbelievers. It shows Paul as an evangelist-apologist, a) who knows his audience, which enables him to respond appropriately to biblical illiteracy – evident both in the way the Christian faith is introduced and in his use of relevant material (e.g. their curiosity), relevant authorities (Cleanthes, Aratus and Epimenides), and relevant lines of argument (from Stoic philosophy), b) who appreciates and appeals to significant points of contact (such as ‘a sense of longing’, ‘a sense of divinity’, and ‘a sense of anxiety’), c) who connects creation (where God can be known indirectly) and the resurrection (where God has made himself known ‘in full’ and ‘by name’), and d) who combines kerygma and apologia.

McGrath claims that this New Testament model is significant for contemporary apologetics (see further 6.3.1).

6.2.2.2 Carson on Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics

Donald A. Carson’s exegetical views on – what he considers to be Luke’s credible, “condensed report”⁷¹⁴ in – Acts 17:16-34 could (on the basis of various key comments,

⁷¹³ McGrath, A. 1998c:265. See also McGrath, A. 1992a:49.

⁷¹⁴ Carson 2000a:391. Carson considers Luke as the author of Acts and claims that the Lucan

primarily in *The Gagging of God, For the Love of God I-II* and “Athens Revisited”) be summarized as follows:⁷¹⁵

Paul encountered “remarkable intellectual challenges in Athens”⁷¹⁶. 17:16 shows how Paul evaluated Athens on the basis of a “God-centred cultural analysis”⁷¹⁷. 17:17 reflects Paul’s “persistent evangelism of both biblical literates and biblical illiterates”⁷¹⁸. 17:18 (and the speech itself) indicates that Paul in his approach in Athens engaged simultaneously with both Epicurean and Stoic philosophy.⁷¹⁹ Paul is “finally brought before the Areopagus”⁷²⁰ (cf. 17:19-21).

Carson claims further that Paul’s speech in 17:22ff demonstrates his courtesy and sensitivity, yet it is “coupled with certain restraint ... lest he jeopardize the gospel”⁷²¹.

Paul’s strategic use of the altar in 17:23 reflects the contrast between Athenian animistic fears of unknown powers and Paul’s message about the knowable God.⁷²² Paul’s emphasis on the doctrines of creation (as expressed in 17:24-26, 29) and resurrection (as expressed in 17:18, 31) rule out a) Stoic pantheism (since God is the sovereign Creator), b) Epicurean

account of Paul’s speeches is credible (cf. Carson et al 1992:185-190).

⁷¹⁵ Carson refers primarily to the exegetical discussions in Balch 1990; Barr 1993; Barrett 1974; Bruce 1990a; Proctor 1992; Winter 1991; and Yeo 1994. See also Carson 1993c:51-53.

⁷¹⁶ Carson 1990:210. Carson elsewhere describes these challenges as “the enormous spiritual and intellectual hurdles at Athens” (Carson 1992:80).

⁷¹⁷ Carson 2000a:391; see also Carson 1998a (on Feb 10) and Carson 1996b: 498.

⁷¹⁸ Carson 2000a:391.

⁷¹⁹ Carson 1996b:498-501. See also Carson 2000a:389-390, where he points out that neither sophists nor atheistic philosophical materialists (such as Lucretius) are mentioned in the Lucan report.

⁷²⁰ Carson 1996b:498.

⁷²¹ Carson 1996b:498-499.

deism (since God is immanent), c) neo-Platonic dualism (since God is the God of both creation and resurrection)⁷²³, d) Athenian polytheistic idolatry (since God is self-existent), and e) Athenian tribal deities (since God is sovereign over all the nations).⁷²⁴ In 17:25 Paul stresses God's 'aseity' (i.e. his self-existence)⁷²⁵ and humanity's utter dependence on him ("as the human correlative of the doctrines of creation and providence"⁷²⁶). This emphasis in Paul's speech on "God's creative power and providential rule establish what the pagan nations *ought* to learn, and their *obligation* to draw the right conclusions"⁷²⁷. "From theology proper, Paul turns to anthropology"⁷²⁸ in 17:26, with an emphasis on unity and universality. Universal human rebellion against the Creator is hinted at in 17:27⁷²⁹ and clearly stated in 17:29-30.⁷³⁰ Despite human rebellion and God's judgment, God is still close (17:27), a fact underscored by some Greek poets (17:28).⁷³¹ Paul uses the sentiments of these poets in a sophisticated way "to bridge some gaps"⁷³², in order to express meaningfully "God's personal and immediate concern for our well-being"⁷³³. Paul expounds in 17:29 on the implications of the theology and anthropology argued for in the

⁷²² Carson 1996b:499.

⁷²³ See also Carson 1996b:202.

⁷²⁴ Carson 1998a (on Jan 1); Carson 1996b:500-501; and Carson 2000a:392.

⁷²⁵ Carson 1996b:500. See also Carson 1996b:223. Carson argues that the view of God as transcendent and sovereign is fundamental in 17:24-25, "*even before [Paul] makes any mention of Jesus*" (Carson 1996b:230).

⁷²⁶ Carson 2000a:393.

⁷²⁷ Carson 1996b:309.

⁷²⁸ Carson 2000a:393.

⁷²⁹ See also Carson 2000a:393.

⁷³⁰ Carson 1996b:500.

⁷³¹ Carson 1996b:500.

⁷³² Carson 1996b:309.

⁷³³ Carson 2000a:394.

previous verses: it makes “idolatry utterly reprehensible”⁷³⁴. The final emphasis in 17:30-31 on ‘teleological history’⁷³⁵ and ‘realized eschatology’⁷³⁶ challenges the worldviews of the Athenians by the focus on “a particular man, a man accredited by the brute historical fact that God raised him from the dead”⁷³⁷.

The Gospel is thus presented, in 17:22-31, within the “linear framework”⁷³⁸ of biblical theism.⁷³⁹ Due to Greek dualistic attitudes among the listeners, Paul’s affirmation of the Resurrection (17:31) “causes so much offense that Paul is cut off”⁷⁴⁰. Carson argues, however, that 17:32-34 (and 1 Cor. 2:1-5) clearly does not imply that Paul’s approach in Athens was a mistake.⁷⁴¹ These final verses in the passage, it is claimed, should be understood as describing two stages: “Following Paul’s address, no one became a Christian

⁷³⁴ Carson 2000a:394.

⁷³⁵ Carson 1996b:500; see also Carson 1996b:202.

⁷³⁶ Carson 1996b:310; see also the quote from Carson in 4.4.3.

⁷³⁷ Carson 1996b:501.

⁷³⁸ Carson 2000a:394.

⁷³⁹ Carson 1996b:230,501,503.

⁷⁴⁰ Carson 2000a:395.

⁷⁴¹ Carson points to a number of key reasons for this view of the consistency between Acts 17:32-34 and 1 Cor. 2:1-5: a) This is the natural reading of Acts, both in terms of the narrative flow (where there is no indications that Luke wanted his readers to consider this Athenian visit to have been a mistake) and the Greek text of 17:32-34 (see the quote from Carson in 4.5.3). b) Paul’s initial message in the *agora* was characterized as ‘the good news’ (17:18). c) The theology of Paul’s speech is in line with the theology of Romans 1-2. d) The apostle was interrupted before he could give a full exposition of the Gospel. e) Paul’s approach in Athens indicates that he thought ‘worldviewishly’, not that he suddenly (after twenty years’ consistent witness among pagan biblical illiterates) compromised the gospel. f) The link between Acts 17 and 1 Cor. 2 is chronological and not causal. g) 1 Cor. 2 should be understood, not against the background of what happened in Athens, but rather against the triumphalism and sophistic rhetoric which seem to have attracted many of the Christians in Corinth. (See: Carson et al 1992:188-189; Carson 1993b:35; Carson 1996a:134; Carson 1996b:503; Carson 1999 (on Feb 15); and Carson 2000a:396-397.) See also 3.3.3.2 and 5.3.1-2.

on the spot. But some did become followers of Paul. In consequence, in due course they grasped the gospel and believed; they became Christians.”⁷⁴²

This exegetical understanding seems to be the basis for Carson’s four major claims about Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics.

First, it is claimed that Paul’s speech in Athens shows that *the apostle thought* ‘worldviewishly’⁷⁴³: a) Paul as an evangelist-apologist appreciates the differences between biblical literates and biblical illiterates. This passage illustrates how the Christian worldview is introduced to biblical illiterates in Athens.⁷⁴⁴ b) The *Christian* faith is presented and argued for, as a coherent worldview, in a way which reflects the basic biblical storyline or plotline:⁷⁴⁵

"In a world of finite gods (often supported by one pantheistic deity), cyclical views of history, sub-biblical understandings of sin, multiplied idolatry, dualism that declares all that is material to be bad and all that is spiritual to be good, tribal deities, and not a little superstition, Paul paints a worldview of the true God, a linear view of history, the nature of sin and idolatry, impending judgment, the unity of the human race and the oneness of God – *all as the necessary framework without which his proclamation of Jesus makes no sense.*"⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴² Carson 2000a:397.

⁷⁴³ Carson 1999 (on Feb 15) and Carson 2000a:397.

⁷⁴⁴ See Carson 2000a:387.

⁷⁴⁵ It is argued that this “biblical plotline establishes an entire worldview for Christians” (Carson 1996b:313). Carson writes elsewhere that Paul’s theological outlook (as found in the epistles, e.g. on mission and prayer) is shaped by ‘the Bible’s story-line’ (see Carson 2000c:179,182-183).

⁷⁴⁶ Carson 1998a (on July 30; see also Carson 1995b:154). Carson compares this with Acts 13:13-52, where Paul “does not have to explain basic categories the way he does to the Athenians.

c) Paul engages with the Athenians at the level of *their* worldviews,⁷⁴⁷ thus interacting with both Stoicism and Epicureanism (as well as with neo-Platonic dualism and popular idolatry).⁷⁴⁸ Carson seems to emphasize Paul's interaction with the Stoics, since it is claimed that "many of the expressions in this address, especially in the early parts, are the sorts of things one would have found in Stoic circles"⁷⁴⁹ The major problem in the Stoic worldview, as Paul seems to have realized, was that pantheism shaped both its view of the world and of what is wrong with the world.⁷⁵⁰

Secondly, Paul's speech in Athens is seen as a key biblical example of "a preparation for the gospel... [where Paul] used as many contacts with [the Athenians'] culture as possible in order to *establish some common ground*".⁷⁵¹ Paul shows thus a specific understanding of this particular cultural context.⁷⁵²

Thirdly, Paul argues (Carson claims) that *God has left traces in creation* of his existence, power and divine nature. This apologetic argument a) is used in evangelism over against Gentiles (both in this passage and in Acts 14:15-18), b) has as its starting point "the

who are biblically illiterate" (Carson 1999, on Jan 13).

⁷⁴⁷ Carson 1995b:154.

⁷⁴⁸ See Carson 1996b:498-501.

⁷⁴⁹ Carson 2000a:392. Paul's interaction with both Stoics and Epicureans is more evenly emphasized in Carson 1996b:498.

⁷⁵⁰ See Carson 1998a (on Apr 28).

⁷⁵¹ Carson et al 1992:188-189; italics added.

⁷⁵² Carson 1995b:150-154.

personal/ transcendent Creator-God of the Hebrew canon”⁷⁵³, and c) claims “that there is sufficient revelation in nature to rob human beings of excuses”⁷⁵⁴.

Fourthly, it is emphasized that Paul considered the key defining elements of the Christian worldview and the Christian Gospel as *nonnegotiable*. Carson writes accordingly:

“Although the gospel must be presented to any group in terms of the categories and felt needs of that group, just as Paul wisely shapes his presentation of the gospel to the Athenians to take into account their intellectual history and structures (Acts 17), *it must always press on to the point where it is in some measure subverting and overthrowing the categories of that culture*”.⁷⁵⁵

This is especially evident in this passage from Paul’s affirmation of the realities of sin, the divine judgment, and the Resurrection of Jesus – in the face of Greek idolatry, scepticism and dualism.⁷⁵⁶

For Carson, then, Acts 17:16-34 is a significant New Testament model of apologetics, since it is the foremost example of a speech to biblical illiterates in a pluralistic setting. It shows Paul as an evangelist-apologist, a) who is thinking ‘worldviewishly’, both in his use of the biblical plotline and in his interaction with other beliefs (esp. Stoicism, but also

⁷⁵³ Carson 1996b:182. Carson observes, incidentally, that Kant differs radically from Paul, by arguing from below (with human reason as the test of all things) “that one cannot by reason move from the phenomenal realm to the noumenal realm”. (Carson 1996b:182) Carson argues, however, that there are “limits in how far Paul will go. Unlike [James] Barr, Paul will not use ‘natural theology’ *against* biblical revelation.” (Carson 1996b:498-499; see also Barr 1993:27-28.)

⁷⁵⁴ Carson 1996b:183. Carson emphasizes that, according to Acts 17:16-34, nature contains no *saving* knowledge of God (see Carson 1996b:183,308-310). He writes elsewhere: “Human beings are supposed to know God. We are made in his image and enough of his nature and character has been stamped on our conscience that we are eternally without excuse.” (Carson 1995a:122)

Epicureanism and neo-Platonic dualism), b) who is seeking to establish some common ground with his listeners (through the use of appropriate cultural features), c) who appeals to divine traces in creation in his arguments to Gentiles, and d) who affirms a challenging, nonnegotiable Gospel in the face of pluralism and paganism.

Carson claims that this New Testament model is relevant for contemporary apologetics (see further 6.3.2).

6.2.2.3 Commonalities and differences

McGrath and Carson share common views on Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics in a number of areas. *First*, both authors focus on Acts 17:16-34 as a significant text on apologetics in the New Testament material, due to the nature both of Paul's audience and of his speech. *Secondly*, McGrath and Carson both focus on Paul's awareness of biblical illiteracy as a key characteristic of the audience in Athens, and that this essential knowledge about the listeners shaped his apologetic approach. A key example of this (both authors point out) is Paul's emphasis on the nature of God before introducing the specific gospel themes. *Thirdly*, there is a common emphasis on Paul's interaction with relevant Athenian beliefs or worldviews, where both authors focus on Paul's use of Stoic expressions and Stoic philosophy. *Fourthly*, Carson and McGrath both interpret 17:23ff as an apologetic argument from creation, based on 'God-given points of contact' (McGrath)

⁷⁵⁵ Carson 1995c:59.

⁷⁵⁶ See Carson 1996b:500-501 and Carson 2000a:395-396.

or 'traces God has left' (Carson) within the created order. *Fifthly*, both authors highlight the confirming and challenging role of the Resurrection in Paul's argument. *Sixthly*, the authors have a common emphasis on the close relationship between apologetics and evangelistic preaching in Paul's speech.

There are also some important differences between McGrath and Carson's views of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics. *First*, they differ in their approach to the text, both in terms of exegesis and apologetics. Exegetically, McGrath largely presupposes the exegetical basis for his views, whereas Carson's arguments are more directly linked to the exegetical discussion. In terms of apologetics, McGrath for the most part uses commonly accepted apologetic terminology, while Carson largely does not develop his views with the use of such terminology. *Secondly*, they differ in what they emphasize about Paul's apologetics in Athens. McGrath sets his focus on Paul's appreciation and use of God-given points of contact within the created order. Thus, the emphasis is on the apostolic apologetic as a bridgebuilding activity via natural theology. Carson, on the other hand, focuses on Paul's appreciation and use of the biblical plotline to establish the Christian worldview over against other worldviews. Thus, the emphasis is on the apostolic apologetic as a challenging of alternative beliefs.

6.2.2.4 A critique based on the model outlined in 5.4.2

This section presents a critique of McGrath and Carson's views on Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics on the basis of the model outlined in 5.4.2.⁷⁵⁷

1. On the Judeo-Christian worldview: *It was argued in 5.4.2.1 that Luke in Acts 17:16-34 describes Paul as an apologist steeped in a genuinely Judeo-Christian worldview in the midst of the challenging pluralistic and pagan context of Athens.* McGrath and Carson would largely agree with this description, since both emphasize a) Paul's commitment to a genuinely biblical view of who God is and to the Christian *kerygma*, b) the pluralism and biblical illiteracy of the audience, and c) Paul's apologetic interaction with the audience as an intended role-model. McGrath and Carson's focus, however, seems to be on Paul in Athens – not only as an apologist – but as an evangelist-apologist. This is also evident from their somewhat uncritical use of the inadequate term '*sermon*' to describe Paul's speech (*contra* 3.4.2 and 3.5.3).⁷⁵⁸ Carson's hesitant and ambivalent use of the term 'apologetics' to describe Paul's approach and address in Athens should also be mentioned in this context.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁷ *Exegetically*, as shown above, neither McGrath nor Carson offers a detailed and comprehensive treatment of the text, but their studies seem largely to be based on a responsible exegesis.

⁷⁵⁸ See e.g. McGrath, A. 1992a:47,233; McGrath, A. 1998c:261; and Carson 1996b:308,503

⁷⁵⁹ On the one hand, Carson refers to Christian witness that follows the example of Paul in Athens as something "much more than an intellectually responsible and biblically faithful apologetic" (Carson 1996b:96). On the other hand, Carson refers in passing to Paul's speech in Athens as apologetics (cf. Carson 1996b:182) and introduces (as shown previously) Paul's emphasis on the Bible's plotline in 'worldview evangelism' as an alternative approach to Frame's

2. On the 'proactive' approach: *It was argued in 5.4.2.2 that Luke probably describes Paul as an apologist who gradually sees the need for a proactive approach in agora contexts.*

Neither McGrath nor Carson interprets the text in this way. In fact, both authors seem to come close to treating Paul's speech as a 'missionary primer' which included crucial apologetic features, thus seemingly not adequately appreciating its key function as an apologetic follow-up speech (see 3.5.2.2). This seems to be due to McGrath and Carson's tendencies to mingle apologetics and evangelism in their interpretations of the text.

3. On the contextual understanding: *It was argued in 5.4.2.3 that Luke implicitly describes Paul as a Christian apologist with a contextual understanding of relevant questions, objections and alternatives in Athens to his claims about 'Jesus and the Resurrection'. As shown above (6.2.1), neither McGrath nor Carson uses this specific terminology in their normative discussions of apologetics. Both authors, however, emphasize Paul's awareness of the cultural presuppositions of the audience, which enabled him to build bridges to his listeners (McGrath's emphasis) and to clarify the content of the gospel (Carson's emphasis).*

4. On the justification procedures: *It was argued in 5.4.2.4 that Luke describes Paul as an apologist with an awareness of and an ability to apply appropriate justification procedures in various contexts, relative to whether people have any knowledge of the OT Scriptures and/or belief in the OT Scriptures as authoritative. McGrath and Carson both emphasize*

the biblical illiterate audience in Athens and the resulting need for Paul to establish as much common ground as possible. McGrath also writes briefly on Paul's appeal to relevant authorities and his use of relevant lines of argument. Neither of them, however, develops what may have counted as appropriate justification procedures in the pluralistic context of the Athenian *agora*, or discusses to what extent Paul may have appealed to such commonly accepted criteria of truth and/or rationality.

5. On the 'positive deconstruction': *It was argued in 5.4.2.5 that Luke describes Paul before the Areopagus as a 'proactive' Christian apologist who starts with the beliefs of the Athenians and 'positively deconstructs' these beliefs.* Neither author uses this specific terminology, but both are concerned with how Paul in his apologetics relates to other beliefs. Whereas both McGrath and Carson focus on Paul's interaction with the Stoics, seemingly at the expense of his dialogue with the Epicureans (see 3.4.4.3), they differ in their emphases. While McGrath acknowledges Paul's argumentative move towards a challenge to conversion, the emphasis is on relevant 'points of continuity and contact' with Stoicism. Carson, on the other hand, recognizes Paul's positive use of Stoic beliefs and expression, but the emphasis is on relevant 'points of discontinuity and tension' with Stoicism.⁷⁶⁰ However, the approach adopted in chapter 3-5 of this thesis, where *both emphases* are seen as equally legitimate and upheld in creative tension, seems more justifiable in the light of the Lucan text.

⁷⁶⁰ It should be noticed that 'points of continuity and contact' and 'points of discontinuity and tension' are the expressions of the present author.

6. On the overall structure of the arguments: *It was argued in 5.4.2.6 that Luke describes Paul as a Christian apologist with an overall argument before the Areopagus, where he moves from arguments about the credibility of a Judeo-Christian natural theology through the plausibility and implications of God's ultimate authority to the significance and evidence of the Resurrection.* Neither McGrath nor Carson describes Paul's overall argumentative structure in these categories, though both focus on Paul's emphasis on the nature of God before introducing the specific gospel themes. Carson's main contribution to the understanding of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics, however, is his claim that Paul's overall argumentative structure – when establishing the Christian worldview – reflects the biblical storyline.

7. On 'the natural theology argument': *It was argued in 5.4.2.7 that Luke presents Paul as an apologist with the argument that, whereas natural theologies such as Stoicism and Epicureanism contain elements of truth, a Judeo-Christian natural theology provides the most adequate view of God, the universe and humanity.* Although both authors mention Paul's apologetic argument from creation, this is where McGrath makes his most significant contribution to the understanding of Acts 17:16-34 as apologetics, especially in his exposition of 17:23-24. He claims that Paul's appreciation and use of God-given points of contact within the created order before the Areopagus Council should be seen as an important role model for apologists. This claim seems highly valid in the light of this thesis. McGrath's further discussion, however, on 'human reason', 'the ordering of the

world' and 'the beauty of the world' as three aspects of nature revealing something of the nature of God, seems argued with a less than sufficient exegetical basis in *this* passage.⁷⁶¹

8. On 'the ultimate authority argument': *It was argued in 5.4.2.8 that Luke presents Paul as an apologist with the argument, that the claim that the Judeo-Christian God has ultimate authority – as expressed in the claims about his final judgment – is plausible, since he is the Creator and Sustainer, and constitutes an appropriate basis for claims about 'the epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith.* Whereas McGrath (implicitly, at least) acknowledges the challenging nature of Paul's approach, this 'ultimate authority argument' is not expounded in his writings on this passage. Carson, however, focuses on this 'ultimate authority argument' when claiming that Paul in his speech argues that the (Christian) notion of sin is justified since human responsibility and accountability are appropriate before the Creator of humanity.

9. On 'the Resurrection argument': *It was argued in 5.4.2.9 that Luke presents Paul as an apologist with the argument that the historical Resurrection of Jesus resonates with ultimate human concerns, indicates the uniqueness and authority of Jesus, and is based on sufficient, available evidence.* Both authors mention the Resurrection as the climax of Paul's speech – *either* as appealing to a sense of anxiety and clinching the argument about the knowable God (McGrath) *or* as challenging Neo-Platonic dualism and accrediting Jesus (Carson). However, neither author explores in depth the role of the Resurrection in

⁷⁶¹ See McGrath, A. 1998c:262-265.

Paul's apologetic argument nor develops Paul's implicit claim on the evidential force of the Resurrection.

10. On the threefold apologetic aim: *It was argued in 5.4.2.10 that Luke presents Paul as an apologist with a threefold apologetic aim: 'to interest', 'to persuade' and 'to confront'.*

While Carson acknowledges Paul's aim of generating interest, he emphasizes the confrontational dimension of Paul's apologetic. McGrath, on the other hand, (with his non-confrontational view of apologetics) focuses on Paul's aim of generating interest. Neither author emphasizes nor develops 'to persuade' as an aim.

This section (6.2.2) has shown that a) both authors emphasize Paul as a Judeo-Christian evangelist-apologist, with an appropriate contextual understanding which enables him to engage in a meaningful way with relevant cultural elements and key beliefs (especially Stoicism); b) neither author interprets the Areopagus Speech as a proper apologetic (follow-up) speech nor develops Paul's justification procedures in the agora context; c) neither author presents a balanced view on Paul's 'positive deconstruction' approach, since McGrath accentuates Paul's 'natural theology argument' and his creative use of significant points of contact whereas Carson's emphasis is on Paul's 'ultimate authority argument' and his challenging confrontation with their worldviews; and d) although both authors mention the role of the Resurrection in Paul's argument, neither

develops properly what is implied in Paul's stress on evidence and credibility in relation to the Resurrection.

These critical observations indicate that whereas both authors make significant contributions to the understanding of Paul as an apologist in Athens, neither presents an adequate or comprehensive view.

6.2.3 McGrath and Carson on postmodernism as a challenge to contemporary apologetics: An analysis and a critique

As shown in 6.2.1, McGrath and Carson both view postmodernism as a major contemporary challenge to Christian apologetics. This section presents a comparative analysis and critique of these two authors' a) tentative definitions of postmodernism, b) descriptions of the postmodern challenge to apologetics, c) views on possible epistemological implications of the postmodern challenge for apologetics, and d) proposals for apologetic approaches to postmodernism.

6.2.3.1 McGrath on the postmodern challenge to contemporary apologetics

1. Alister E. McGrath describes postmodernism as one of the major contemporary non-Christian worldviews (see 6.2.1.1). He defines it as "the general intellectual outlook arising after the collapse of modernity",⁷⁶² or as "a major change in cultural mood"⁷⁶³. It is

⁷⁶² McGrath, A. 1992a:223. This worldview is seen as a temporary challenge to apologetics since "there are indications that postmodernism is unlikely to remain a significant feature of our

characterized, he claims, by a “precommitment to relativism or pluralism in relation to questions of truth”⁷⁶⁴. Elsewhere, McGrath defines postmodernism more substantially as “something of a cultural sensibility without absolutes, fixed certainties, or foundations, which takes delight in pluralism and divergence, and which aims to think through the radical ‘situatedness’ of all human thought”.⁷⁶⁵

McGrath points out that representatives of postmodernism are found in structural linguistics⁷⁶⁶ and deconstruction⁷⁶⁷, and identifies Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard and Rorty as key writers. As an intellectual movement, a key distinguishing characteristic of postmodernism, McGrath claims, is “its contention that claims to truth often represent disguised attempts to justify the power, status or vested interests of the claimants”⁷⁶⁸.

cultural landscape” (McGrath, A. 1992a:229).

⁷⁶³ McGrath, A. 1994c:222. Accordingly, in ‘A Glossary of Terms’ is defined as follows: “A general cultural development, especially in North America, which resulted from the collapse in confidence of the universal principles of the Enlightenment” (McGrath, A. 2001a:759; cf. also McGrath, A. 1997b:431 and McGrath, A. 1999a:188).

⁷⁶⁴ McGrath, A. 1992a:223; cf. also McGrath, A. 1994a:103 and McGrath, A. 1996:185. Its leading general feature is further described as “the deliberate and systematic abandonment of centralizing narratives” (McGrath, A. 1996:185).

⁷⁶⁵ McGrath, A. 1994a:102; McGrath, A. 1996:184; and McGrath, A. 1998e:9-10.

⁷⁶⁶ McGrath remarks perceptively that postmodernism “represents a situation in which the signifier (or signifying) has replaced the signified as the focus of orientation and value” (McGrath, A. 1994a:103). See also McGrath, A. 1992a:223 and McGrath, A. 1996:185.

⁷⁶⁷ McGrath observes that deconstructionism indicates the postmodern obsession with texts and language, claiming that all interpretations are “equally valid, or equally meaningless (depending upon your point of view). As Paul de Man ... declared, the very idea of ‘meaning’ smacked of fascism.” (McGrath, A. 1994a:103-104)

⁷⁶⁸ McGrath, A. 1998e:10. McGrath writes elsewhere that postmodernism as an intellectual movement proclaims “that, in the first place, the Enlightenment rested on fraudulent intellectual foundations (such as the belief in the omniscience of human reason), and in the second, it ushered in some of the most horrific events in human history – such as the Stalinist purges and the Nazi extermination camps” (McGrath, A. 1994b:185).

In his analysis, McGrath also connects postmodernism (“with its vigorous rejection of universal truth claims and its commitment to openendedness”⁷⁶⁹) with New Age religiosity, since the latter movement (or worldview) is “widely regarded by cultural analysts as a protest against the spiritual barrenness of the Enlightenment’s emphasis upon pure reason”⁷⁷⁰.

2. McGrath claims that postmodernism represents a ‘paradigm shift’ (comparable to the Reformation and the Enlightenment), which challenges theology in terms of “existing understandings of background presuppositions, norms and methods”⁷⁷¹. For apologetics, this postmodern challenge has various facets.

First, Christian apologetics needs to explore the epistemological and evangelistic implications of postmodernism’s increasing questioning of the former major rival worldview to the Christian faith, Enlightenment rationalism. McGrath claims in this context that “the days of a blind secular faith in human reason are behind us... [and that] Christianity has as much right as any other belief-system to gain a hearing”⁷⁷².

Secondly, Christian apologetics needs to engage with this new, postmodern cultural mood, where all belief-systems are regarded as equally plausible and the truth-question seems to

⁷⁶⁹ McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:52.

⁷⁷⁰ McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:52.

⁷⁷¹ McGrath, A. 1999c:83.

⁷⁷² McGrath, A. 1992a:225.

be dismissed by postmodernism in advance.⁷⁷³ In this context McGrath maintains that apologetics must offer substantial answers to such key questions as these: “How can Christianity’s claims to truth be taken seriously, when there are so many rival alternatives, and when ‘truth’ itself has become a devalued notion?”⁷⁷⁴

3. McGrath claims that postmodernism should lead to a rethinking of apologetic epistemology, due to (what he describes as) “the lingering death of foundationalism”⁷⁷⁵.

McGrath defines foundationalism as

“the pervasive western philosophical doctrine that every non-basic belief must ultimately be accepted on the basis of universally compelling beliefs or realities, which are themselves in need of no support, and which transcend the particularities of culture, chronology, and geography. The Enlightenment generally regarded such beliefs as being limited to those which were self-evidently true, or which related directly to one’s own sense-experience, or which were evident to the senses.”⁷⁷⁶

Focusing on evangelical apologetics – from the perspective of “a committed yet critical evangelical”⁷⁷⁷ – McGrath claims that much apologetics has been influenced by this Enlightenment epistemology.

⁷⁷³ See McGrath, A. 1992a:225. McGrath does not use the terms ‘epistemic permission’ and ‘epistemic obligation’, but they would be appropriate terms to express his arguments in this context.

⁷⁷⁴ McGrath, A. 1996:188. See also McGrath, A. 1992a:224, where the first question is identified.

⁷⁷⁵ McGrath, A. 1998e:11. See also McGrath, A. 2000b:33-34.

⁷⁷⁶ McGrath, A. 1998e:12. McGrath claims accordingly: “One of the relatively few insights of postmodernism with which I find myself in full agreement is that there is no privileged vantage point independent of tradition that allows us to read any text – biblical or otherwise – devoid of prior assumptions and precommitments.” (McGrath, A. 2000a:148)

⁷⁷⁷ McGrath, A. 1994b:3.

This secular influence on evangelical apologetics, he argues, is evident in a) “its foundational assumption of universal categories of evidence and rationality”⁷⁷⁸, b) a seemingly widespread assumption that “the appeal of Christianity is purely rational”⁷⁷⁹, and c) its equation of “the biblical idea of ‘truth’ ... with the Enlightenment notion of conceptual or propositional correspondence”⁷⁸⁰. McGrath refers thus, with assent, to Bloesch’s critique⁷⁸¹ of the writings of key evangelical contemporary apologists such as C. F. H. Henry, J. W. Montgomery, F. A. Schaeffer and N. Geisler as embodying “a strongly rationalist spirit”.⁷⁸²

Accordingly, McGrath claims that evangelical apologetics in a post-Enlightenment context is “free to avoid the false lure of foundationalism, and to maintain the integrity of divine revelation on its own terms and in its own categories”⁷⁸³. Thus, evangelicalism needs to allow its approach to apologetics “to be reshaped and fashioned by the New Testament, rather than the outmoded presuppositions of a now defunct Enlightenment”⁷⁸⁴. McGrath has not (as yet) developed such an approach, but he refers especially to Topping’s contribution⁷⁸⁵ for “some promising indications”⁷⁸⁶.

⁷⁷⁸ McGrath, A. 1996:176.

⁷⁷⁹ McGrath, A. 1996:176.

⁷⁸⁰ McGrath, A. 1996:177.

⁷⁸¹ Bloesch 1979:267-268.

⁷⁸² McGrath, A. 1996:170.

⁷⁸³ McGrath, A. 1996:172.

⁷⁸⁴ McGrath, A. 1996:176.

⁷⁸⁵ Topping 1991, which offers a critique of C. F. H. Henry and S. C. Hackett as ‘foundationalist’ evangelical apologists. See also Van den Toren 1993, which is written with guidance from McGrath and proposes a line of argument where Christianity is presented “as a

4. McGrath's proposal for apologetics over against the postmodern challenge focuses on a restructuring of the traditional argumentative strategy.⁷⁸⁷

First, Christian apologists should "adopt a tactical approach"⁷⁸⁸, where *the attractiveness and relevance of God should be argued for first of all*. This includes a focus on key elements such as

"the ability of God to satisfy the deepest human longings, ... the overwhelming love of God, as seen in the death of Christ, ... [how] faith in God anchors people, giving them stability and purpose, ... [and how Christianity meets] the need to have a basis for morality, ... the need to have a framework for making sense of experience, ... [and] the need for a vision to guide and inspire people".⁷⁸⁹

This also implies that McGrath emphasizes *experience* as "a vital 'point of contact' for Christian apologetics in a postmodern world"⁷⁹⁰.

Secondly, Christian apologists should *continue by arguing that "truth matters"*⁷⁹¹.

McGrath claims that this may be shown clearly by the uncovering of a key internal inconsistency in central postmodern writers, such as e.g. when M. Foucault writes about

superior tradition, being truer to reality, because it overcomes and explains the inconsistencies and limitations of rival traditions" (Van den Toren 1993:60).

⁷⁸⁶ McGrath, A. 1996:278.

⁷⁸⁷ McGrath links his approach to "the rise of a person-centred apologetics, ... which aims to remain faithful to the gospel while ensuring that it enmeshes fully and faithfully with the situations to which it is addressed" (McGrath, A. 1994b:103).

⁷⁸⁸ McGrath, A. 1992a:225. See also McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:51-54 and McGrath, A. 1994b:103-104.

⁷⁸⁹ McGrath, A. 1992a:226. McGrath's *The Unknown God* exemplifies this approach; see McGrath, A. 1999f.

⁷⁹⁰ McGrath, A. 1996:87; see also McGrath, A. 1993:74 and 6.3.1.

⁷⁹¹ McGrath, A. 1996:197.

ethics. Foucault rejects objective truth and morality, but passionately prefers freedom before repression. Foucault's anti-oppressional ethics, McGrath argues, thus illustrates "the need for foundational principles which Foucault has declared in advance to be oppressive themselves"⁷⁹². McGrath's focus is on Foucault's inability to put forward "any normative standard by which one might be able to distinguish acceptable social régimes (such as the liberal-democratic) from unacceptable totalitarian régimes"⁷⁹³. Accordingly, McGrath suggests that the basic and casual question 'Is postmodernism true?' "innocently raises fundamental criteriological questions which postmodernism finds embarrassingly difficult to handle"⁷⁹⁴.

3) McGrath suggests another, *complementary approach* with a focus on *whether Christianity could be seen as credible*.

"If the word 'truth' continues to cause intractable problems, an alternative approach may be tried. Instead of asking whether Christianity is *true*, the postmodernist might be asked whether it can be regarded as *credible*. This is a direct invitation to discuss the foundations of Christian belief, not least the resurrection of Christ. Why should anyone believe that Christianity is credible? The question of the evidential basis of Christianity can thus be placed directly upon the agenda."⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹² McGrath, A. 1996:195. McGrath points out that his argument is an application to postmodernism of F. A. Schaeffer's argument over against the ethical agnosticism and nihilism of J.-P. Sartre (in Schaeffer 1990:58). Schaeffer expressed the underlying principle of this seminal argument as follows: "The more logical a man who holds a non-Christian position is to his own presuppositions, the further he is from the real world; and the nearer he is to the real world, the more illogical he is to his own presuppositions." (Schaeffer 1990:134; quoted in McGrath, A. 1996:195)

⁷⁹³ McGrath, A. 1996:196.

⁷⁹⁴ McGrath, A. 1996:195. See also McGrath, A. 1992a:227-229.

⁷⁹⁵ McGrath, A. 1992a:229.

4) Christian apologists should argue, *finally*, that *truth* is “accessible”⁷⁹⁶, ultimately, in the person of Jesus Christ as “the embodiment and self-revelation of God”⁷⁹⁷.

This analysis has shown that McGrath a) defines postmodernism as an influential, contemporary worldview which deconstructs metanarratives, rejects the foundationalism of the Enlightenment, and delights in pluralism, b) describes the postmodern challenge to apologetics as an ambiguous combination of openness to any (personal) stories/beliefs and dismissal of any (absolute) truth-claims, c) claims that (much evangelical) apologetics must rethink its rationalist epistemology in the light of Scripture, and d) suggests a restructured argumentative strategy in a postmodern context, arguing first for the attractiveness and relevance of God (especially through the exploration of experience as a significant point of contact), secondly either that truth matters (by exposing key inconsistencies in postmodernism) or that Christianity is credible, and finally, that truth is accessible in Jesus Christ.

6.2.3.2 Carson on the postmodern challenge to contemporary apologetics

1. Donald A. Carson describes postmodernism as a major worldview with a vast influence on contemporary culture⁷⁹⁸. He defines postmodernism (which is “an almost

⁷⁹⁶ McGrath, A. 1996:197.

⁷⁹⁷ McGrath, A. 1996:37; see also McGrath 1997a:74-76. Elsewhere, he claims accordingly, that in “a postmodern world in which all the old certainties of liberalism and rationalism have evaporated, Christianity can and must continue to seek and find its point of reference in Jesus Christ. Here is its central legitimating and defining resource.” (McGrath, A. 1994c:222)

⁷⁹⁸ Carson 1996b:91.133.

infinitely flexible phenomenon”⁷⁹⁹) tentatively as “an outlook that depends not a little on what are perceived to be the fundamental limitations on the power of interpretation: that is, since interpretation can never be more than *my* interpretation or *our* interpretation, no purely objective stance is possible”.⁸⁰⁰ Carson refers to Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and Rorty as primary spokesmen of postmodernism.

Postmodernism, Carson claims, is linked to a specific epistemology, philosophical pluralism and philosophical naturalism:

a) The move ‘from modernity to postmodernity’, he argues, “is primarily *epistemological*”⁸⁰¹, symbolized by the successive change of focus in interpretation “from the author to the text to the reader”⁸⁰².

b) The notion that all interpretation is culturally conditioned and socially constructed⁸⁰³ is supported by philosophical (or hermeneutical) pluralism.⁸⁰⁴ This is the view that “any

⁷⁹⁹ Carson 1998b:2.

⁸⁰⁰ Carson 1996b:57. Elsewhere Carson defines postmodernism, more popularly, as the view that “all ‘knowledge’ is either a personal or a social construct, is never absolute, and is conditioned by just about everything (language, heritage, presuppositions, ...). The only heresy left is the heresy that there is such a thing as heresy.” (Carson 1995b:156)

⁸⁰¹ Carson 1996b:77. He admits, though, “that the term was used with reference to art and the literature in the 1960s, and with reference to architecture and style in the 1970s, before it came to be used with reference to radical hermeneutics and deconstructionism in the 1980s” (Carson 1996b:77).

⁸⁰² Carson 1996b:77.

⁸⁰³ Carson argues that, due to postmodern sensibilities, “truth has perished” (Jer. 7:28) in contemporary Western culture, since postmodernism claims that “all religious claims are driven by sociological pressures...and not by a divine Being who actually speaks objective truth” (Carson 1999, on July 11).

⁸⁰⁴ Carson refers to contemporary philosophical pluralism as somewhat comparable to the

notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is *necessarily* wrong”⁸⁰⁵. Postmodernism has thus, according to Carson, “convinced many of the absolute relativity of all truth claims, not least religious truth claims”⁸⁰⁶.

c) Carson argues that philosophical naturalism is a shared assumption of both modernity and postmodernism,⁸⁰⁷ but that (contrary to modernity) in postmodernism “the quest for certainty has gone, along with dependence on a single approved method in each discipline, all forms of foundationalism, and the confident assertion that the ‘truths’ being discovered enjoy an ahistorical universality”⁸⁰⁸.

2. Carson describes the postmodern challenge to apologetics as implying both possibilities and problems. This is due to an ambiguity in postmodernism, where openness to ‘stories’ is combined with a suspicious attitude towards metanarratives.⁸⁰⁹ Thus, whereas arguments for ‘the epistemic permission’ of the Christian worldview (such as Plantinga’s argument that belief in God is ‘properly basic’) largely seems acceptable in a postmodern context, arguments for ‘the epistemic obligation’ of the Christian worldview is seen as intolerant by postmodernists.⁸¹⁰ Carson also claims that postmodernism “powerfully reinforces the most sentimental, syncretistic, and often pluralistic views of the love of God,

Gnostic heretic challenge to the church in the second century. (See Carson 1996b:10)

⁸⁰⁵ Carson 1996b:19. See also Carson 1996b:57.

⁸⁰⁶ Carson 1996b:182.

⁸⁰⁷ Carson has later qualified this to that “the reading is mixed” (Carson 1998b:2) in postmodernism regarding philosophical naturalism.

⁸⁰⁸ Carson 1996b:77.

⁸⁰⁹ See Carson 1998b and Carson 2000a:394.

⁸¹⁰ Carson 1996b:188, where Carson refers to Netland 1994.

with no other authority base than the postmodern epistemology itself⁸¹¹. Postmodernism also treats ‘sin’ as a social construct.⁸¹²

Carson emphasizes the demanding nature of this postmodern context for Christian apologetics. He claims that traditional approaches, such as various standard forms of evidentialism and presuppositionalism, “simply do not touch the committed deconstructionist”⁸¹³. However, the onset of postmodernism, he maintains, “is fostering refinements in virtually every approach to apologetics, and the result might well be better integration than has been achieved in the past”⁸¹⁴.

3. Carson presents an extensive critique of postmodern epistemology and hermeneutics.⁸¹⁵ He claims that postmodernism is correct in emphasizing that the human knower sees only in part, always with some measure of distortion, and that it is impossible to escape the cultural locatedness.⁸¹⁶ It should also be acknowledged, he maintains, that interpretations advanced to others (including Christian evangelistic statements) *could* be instruments of power, thus controlling, defining and manipulating ‘the others’.⁸¹⁷ Carson claims, however, that the postmodern insistence on “*either* absolute knowledge *or*

⁸¹¹ Carson 2000b:14.

⁸¹² See Carson 1998b:3.

⁸¹³ Carson 1996b:96; cf. also Carson 1995b:156.

⁸¹⁴ Carson 1996b:188.

⁸¹⁵ See the extensive discussion in Carson 1996b:57-191 on postmodern epistemology and hermeneutics.

⁸¹⁶ Carson 1996b:97-100. He writes elsewhere: “If postmodernity has taught us anything, it has taught us that it is impossible for any ‘knower’ to think outside of all paradigms, as an entirely ‘neutral’ observer and thinker.” (Carson 1996b:154)

⁸¹⁷ Carson 1996b:101-102.

complete relativism” is an indefensible antithesis⁸¹⁸, since “human beings can know objective truth – doubtless not exhaustively and absolutely, but truly nonetheless”⁸¹⁹. The Christian worldview has thus, Carson argues, as one of its credible premises, that truth “can be objective and transcendent *even though it is necessarily expressed in culture-laden ways and believed or known by finite, culturally restricted people*”⁸²⁰.

Carson argues therefore, that Christians neither should embrace a modern nor a postmodern epistemology⁸²¹, but be open to acknowledge elements of truth from both perspectives.

“I am simply asserting that a Christian view of our finitude makes allowance for the valid insights from both modernity and postmodernity but succumbs to the worldview of neither. On the one hand, there is such a thing as objective truth; on the other, all human grasping of that truth is necessarily interpretive, but it is not necessarily for that reason untrue or removed from objective truth.”⁸²²

Epistemologically, then, apologetics needs to take into account that the Bible’s “appeal to truth is rich and complex. It cannot be reduced to, but certainly includes, propositional truth”⁸²³. The truth of the biblical worldview, Carson claims (as indicated in 6.2.1.2 and 6.2.2.2), should be argued for in accordance with the biblical storyline, “with full

⁸¹⁸ Carson 1996b:107. See also Carson 1996b:129.

⁸¹⁹ Carson 1996b:544. It should be noted that this expression is reminiscent of F. A. Schaeffer, e.g. in Schaeffer 1990:343-347.

⁸²⁰ Carson 1996b:99. Carson defines ‘objective’ as ‘having extra-mental reality or validity’ (see further Carson 1996b:120).

⁸²¹ Carson 1996b:22. See also Carson 1995b:156 and Carson 1996b:91,156.

⁸²² Carson 1996b:132-133.

⁸²³ Carson 1996b:174.

recognition of the developing plot-line in Scripture, and of Scripture's highly diverse literary genres"⁸²⁴.

4. Carson's proposal for apologetics over against the postmodern challenge focuses on a number of elements.

First, the Christian apologist is obliged to *recognize a number of strengths* – or certain truths – within postmodernism.⁸²⁵ These include some important epistemological and hermeneutical insights (see above on limitations of the human knower and on truth claims as possible instruments of power), as well as key aspects of the postmodern critique of modernity. Thus, the sustained postmodern attack on modernity (accusing it as consisting of manipulative metanarratives⁸²⁶) ironically implies that “the modernity which has arrogantly insisted that human reason is the final arbiter of truth has spawned a stepchild that has arisen to slay it”⁸²⁷.

Secondly, the apologist should *expose inconsistencies within postmodernism*. These include (Carson claims) an indefensible antithesis in postmodern hermeneutics (see above) and a key commitment to relativism. Carson maintains that the “unswerving relativism of

⁸²⁴ Carson 1996b:189.

⁸²⁵ Carson 1996b:91,96-97,136.

⁸²⁶ Carson points out that (according to Lyotard) the ‘metanarratives’ of modernity include “Marxism, Hegel’s theory of universal spirit, the post-Enlightenment view of progress, and, in theology, the view that we should accept as rational in the field of theology only what is judged rational by any reasonable and intelligent person” (Carson 1996b:63).

⁸²⁷ Carson 1996b:100. Carson adds in passing that ‘deconstruction’ also can help Christians “to overthrow the hegemony of *mere* traditionalism” (Carson 1996b:101).

principled postmodernism”⁸²⁸ is highly problematic, since “any statement of relativism, whether grounded in culture, linguistics, or hermeneutics, is fundamentally self-destructive”⁸²⁹. The apologist should thus challenge postmodernists (and philosophical pluralists) to “justify the authority of their position”⁸³⁰.

In this context Carson follows McGrath (see 6.2.3.1) in arguing that *the truth question* naturally *can be raised* in relation to postmodernism (despite the postmodern aversion towards truth):

“But the need to have the truth question on the agenda is relatively easily argued. One method of approach might be the following. To the postmodern suggestion that something can be ‘true for me’ but not ‘true’ the following reply might be made. Is fascism as equally true as democratic libertarianism? Consider the person who believes, passionately and sincerely, that it is an excellent thing to place millions of Jews in gas chambers. That is certainly ‘true for him’. But can it be allowed to pass unchallenged? Is it as equally true as the belief that one ought to live in peace and tolerance with one’s neighbors, including Jews? Should one tolerate the burning of widows on Hindu funeral pyres?”⁸³¹

Thirdly, the Christian apologist should argue for the truth of the Christian faith on the basis of ‘*the biblical plotline*’ (see 6.2.1.1). This means highlighting central biblical truth claims about God, humanity, and salvation⁸³², which together constitute “an *essential* way of

⁸²⁸ Carson 1996b:354.

⁸²⁹ Carson 1996b:176.

⁸³⁰ Carson 1996b:176. Carson claims also that postmodernism is fundamentally backward looking, since it “defines itself most clearly in terms of what it isn’t – and that inevitably means a critique of the past. [Postmodernism] has nowhere to go.” (Carson 1996b:136)

⁸³¹ McGrath, A. 1992b:366, quoted in Carson 1996b:167. See also McGrath, A. 1992a:228-229 and McGrath, A. 1996:192.

⁸³² See esp. Carson 1996b:195-245, 257-278.

looking at the world”⁸³³. Such an apologetic, Carson argues, challenges postmodernism at the worldview level⁸³⁴ and is exemplified in Paul’s approach in Athens (see further 6.3.2).⁸³⁵

Fourthly, contrary to ‘the intolerant tolerance’ of postmodernism and philosophical pluralism, Christian apologists “ought to be *simultaneously arguing* for the truth of the gospel, and insisting that people *have the right to disagree* without fear of coercion”⁸³⁶.

This analysis has shown that Carson a) defines postmodernism as a major contemporary worldview characterized by epistemological scepticism, philosophical pluralism, and philosophical naturalism, b) describes the postmodern challenge to apologetics as an ambiguous combination of openness to any (personal) stories/beliefs and dismissal of any (absolute) truth-claims, c) claims that apologists, on the basis of the biblical worldview, should recognize elements of truths both within modern and postmodern epistemologies, and d) suggests that Christian apologetics should recognize certain strengths in postmodernism, raise the truth question by exposing key inconsistencies within postmodernism, and challenge postmodernism with the biblical metanarrative.

⁸³³ Carson 1995b:150.

⁸³⁴ Carson describes this elsewhere as a challenging of plausibility structures (see Carson 1995b:154).

⁸³⁵ See Carson 1995b:154 and Carson 1996b:183-184.

⁸³⁶ Carson 1996b:134; italics added.

6.2.3.3 Commonalities and differences

It seems instructive to begin this critical comparison of McGrath and Carson's views on the postmodern challenge to apologetics with McGrath's review of Carson's *The Gagging of God*:

"Carson chooses to focus on the area of NT interpretation (an excellent decision), and is able to set out clearly the weaknesses of postmodern hermeneutics. Readers of *Themelios* who are active in any literary field will find his criticisms of postmodern theory persuasive and helpful. Perhaps I have misunderstood Carson at some points; however, I gained the impression that he regards postmodernism as a *uniformly* negative matter. My own impression is that it does have serious weaknesses; nevertheless it at least allows evangelicalism to throw off its enslavement to Enlightenment rationalism, which has so hindered its spiritual and theological vitality in the first half of the present century. Postmodernism, like the modernism which it aims to displace, is best viewed as containing both opportunities and challenges for evangelicalism. It is the task of theologians to distinguish these. While I personally have considerable doubts about the merits of postmodernism, it does at least allow us to shake off the 'evangelical rationalism' that has managed to infiltrate North American evangelicalism at a number of points."⁸³⁷

There are a number of areas, however, where McGrath and Carson clearly share common views on postmodernism and its challenge to apologetics. *First*, McGrath and Carson seem largely to agree on the definition of postmodernism, as well as on the seemingly temporary character of the postmodern worldview⁸³⁸. *Secondly*, both authors include both possibilities and problems in their descriptions of the postmodern challenge to apologetics. Whereas the possibilities primarily are due to postmodern openness to arguments for 'the epistemic

⁸³⁷ McGrath, A. 1997d:23.

⁸³⁸ McGrath, A. 1992a:229 and Carson 1996b:136.

permission' of the Christian faith, the problems seem related to postmodern aversion to arguments for 'the epistemic obligation' of the Christian faith (or any other absolute truth-claims). McGrath's critique of Carson (see above) seems thus exaggerated, since both authors acknowledge certain truths *and* point out fundamental weaknesses in postmodernism (as well as in modernism). *Thirdly*, McGrath and Carson both emphasize the appropriateness of exposing key inconsistencies within postmodernism and the necessity of ultimately raising the truth question in a postmodern context.

As indicated by McGrath's critique of Carson, however, there are also some important differences between the two authors. *First*, McGrath and Carson disagree in their views of the extent to which evangelical apologetics has been shaped by Enlightenment epistemology.⁸³⁹ *Secondly*, whereas the emphasis in McGrath's approach is on building bridges between postmodern experience and the Christian gospel's claims to attractiveness and relevance, Carson's approach has its focus on challenging the postmodern worldview with the biblical metanarrative. *Thirdly*, while both authors analyze the postmodern challenge to apologetics in terms of scepticism, pluralism and relativism, Carson highlights the naturalistic claims of philosophical postmodernism more explicitly than McGrath does.

⁸³⁹ It should be noticed that this disagreement is part of a wider discussion on the extent to which 19th century American conservative theology (esp. as represented by the Old Princeton Presbyterianism of C. Hodge and B. B. Warfield) was influenced by Scottish Common Sense Realism, and in that case if that influence had a decisive and negative affect on the Princeton theology's views on truth, Scripture and apologetics. Whereas McGrath accepts the view that the Princeton theology philosophically should be described as an 'evangelical rationalism' (see McGrath, A. 1996:168-170,273; cf. McGrath, A. 1998e:13), Carson is highly critical of this view (see Carson 1996b:153-154; cf. also Carson & Woodbridge 1993:161-166). *This wider discussion.*

6.2.3.4 A critique

The tentative definitions of postmodernism offered by McGrath and Carson seem largely to be in accord with the tentative understanding of postmodernism assumed in 6.1.2. However, neither McGrath nor Carson seems to distinguish clearly and consistently between a) cultural (or intellectual) postmodernism and social postmodernity *or* between b) philosophical and popular postmodernism. Whereas both authors emphasize the postmodern aversion towards the notion of absolute truth and the resulting attempts to ‘deconstruct’ truth, neither accentuates the postmodern deconstruction of self and identity. Furthermore, the claims that postmodernism is ‘the general intellectual outlook’ (McGrath) and ‘has a vast influence on contemporary culture’ (Carson) probably need to be qualified, at least in terms of the academy⁸⁴⁰ but possibly also in terms of popular culture⁸⁴¹.

McGrath and Carson present a similar picture of the ambiguity of the postmodern challenge to apologetics. In the light of the preceding discussion, this can be expressed as a widespread cultural *openness* to personal stories and arguments related to ‘the epistemic permission’ of the Christian faith combined with a widespread cultural *aversion* towards

however, on the influences on and the nature of Old Princeton Theology (see e.g. Helseth 1998 on Warfield and apologetics) *is outside the focus of this thesis.*

⁸⁴⁰ Craig points out that theologians “tend to think that postmodern pluralism and relativism are all the rage, when in fact such thinking is largely confined to the literature, social sciences, and religious studies departments at universities. Anglo-American philosophy has in particular sturdily resisted the sirens of postmodernity.” (Craig in Cowan 2000:181; see also Craig 1994:43-44.)

⁸⁴¹ Cook makes the plausible alternative suggestion that postmodernism is one of the key indicators of *relativism* as a “major underlying philosophy and outlook...at the heart of our modern world and our current malaise” (Cook 1996:167; see also Cook 1995c and Netland 1991b:166).

claims and arguments related to ‘the epistemic obligation’ of the Christian faith. This assessment of the postmodern challenge to apologetics seems plausible in view of the definitions of postmodernism assumed by these two authors. Carson’s emphasis on the largely naturalistic character of (philosophical) postmodernism seems appropriate in the light of what was assumed in 6.1.2.

McGrath and Carson’s contributions to apologetics and epistemology are highly different.

Carson offers an insightful in-depth analysis and assessment of postmodern hermeneutics and epistemology, but does not primarily develop his response to these challenges in terms of apologetic theory and practice. Carson is largely pointing to Frame’s modified presuppositionalism as the way forward, but (as shown above; see 6.2.1.4) does not address significant objections to Frame’s approach.

McGrath, on the other hand, does not present an analysis and assessment of postmodern epistemology as such, but offers a controversial critique of (much) traditional evangelical apologetics as being rationalistic (i.e. as decisively influenced by Enlightenment ‘foundationalist’ epistemology). It is appropriate within the scope of this thesis to offer a critical assessment of some central aspects of McGrath’s critique.

First, McGrath's critique must be seen in the context of his valid concerns for a Scripturally based apologetic, which both avoids rationalism⁸⁴² and enables people in a postmodern context to appreciate the attractiveness and relevance of the gospel.

Secondly, whereas postmodernism has shown the inevitable presence of subjective perspectives and presuppositions in rational processes, this does not invalidate the universal validity of basic laws of logic⁸⁴³ and standard forms of reasoning⁸⁴⁴. This relates to Groothuis' claim (over against McGrath) that "Christianity and Enlightenment thought are in basic agreement on the *nature of truth*; the disagreement concerns *what is true, how truth is known* and *what effect truth should have on us*"⁸⁴⁵. This does not imply that the rich

⁸⁴² It seems appropriate to suggest (in the light of 1.2 and chapter 5) that *Christian apologetics becomes rationalistic* a) if the authority of Scripture is denied or neglected (which means that any apologetic approach and argument should be in accordance with the normative content of Scripture, but that the authority of Scripture – at least outside 'the Scripture community' – is an innocuous presupposition, i.e. it does not enter into the actual arguments as a premise; cf. Craig 1989:xv-xvii); b) if the decisive role of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to God – both on the basis of and apart from argument and evidence (see e.g. Netland 1995:264-265) – is denied or neglected; and c) if arguments and evidence for the truth of the Christian faith are considered to be coercive.

⁸⁴³ The basic laws of logic include the following: 1) the law (or principle) of non-contradiction ('A is not non-A'), 2) the law (or principle) of identity ('A is A'), and 3) the law (or principle) of the excluded middle ('either A or non-A'); see e.g. Geisler 1999:427-429; Groothuis 2000:88,176-178; Nash 1999:193-207; and Netland 1991b:183-184.

⁸⁴⁴ It has been pointed out that (at least) three crucial elements are involved in a good argument: "First of all, *it must be sound*, which means that its premises must be true and the conclusion must follow from the premises in accord with the rules of logic. Second, *it must not be question-begging*; that is to say, the reasons you believe the premises to be true must be independent of the argument's conclusion ... Finally, *the premises of the argument must be more plausible than their denials*." (Craig 2000:7) Such key elements seem to be valid and necessary, regardless of contexts.

⁸⁴⁵ Groothuis 2000:131. Groothuis' critique of McGrath may be appropriate in relation to the specific, controversial passage in *A Passion for Truth*, but it does not present an adequate analysis of this passage in the context of other relevant discussions by McGrath.

biblical concept of truth⁸⁴⁶ is reduced to ‘the Enlightenment notion of conceptual or propositional correspondence’, but that “without the correspondence theory of truth there can be no such thing as *informative* language or *factual* meaning”⁸⁴⁷.

Thirdly, whereas the (total) appeal of Christianity never is purely rational, the apologetic task is by definition limited to ‘rational justification’. For apologetics to make sense outside ‘the Scripture community’, what is counted as ‘rational’ within the Christian faith must be related to what may be shown – across contexts and traditions – as ‘rational’ on the basis of key criteria of truth (such as coherence and consistency, correspondence with reality, and pragmatic relevance and adequacy).⁸⁴⁸

Fourthly, a shared created reality – including a shared created rationality – constitutes the basis for Schaeffer’s apologetic approach to existentialism (and other worldviews such as pantheism), an approach adopted by McGrath (as shown above, see 6.2.3.1) in relation to postmodernism. This points to what seems to be an inconsistency in *A Passion for Truth* between McGrath’s principled rejection of any universal rationality and his practical appeal to a shared rationality.

⁸⁴⁶ See Nicole 1983.

⁸⁴⁷ Preus 1973:24. See also Willard 1998 and Willard 2000:34-39.

⁸⁴⁸ The plausibility of viewing such criteria of truth as ‘context-independent’ has been argued in Netland 1991a and Netland 1991b:180-193. This may also be related to a more general issue: “If no agreed criteria of meaning, rationality and truth are thought to operate across boundaries of gender, race, class, history and religious tradition, society is doomed.” (Thiselton 2000:436)

Fifthly, the claim that evangelical apologists C. F. Henry, J. W. Montgomery, F. A. Schaeffer and N. Geisler are rationalistic in their apologetic approaches is highly disputed.⁸⁴⁹

It is also appropriate to offer a critique of McGrath and Carson's largely complementary proposals for apologetics in a postmodern context.

First, McGrath's suggestions for a restructured approach— both in terms of emphasizing relevance and attractiveness ('plausibility') before truth *per se* ('credibility') and of showing the importance of truth and rationality before arguing for the truth of the Christian faith – seem legitimate and strategic in view of the nature of the postmodern challenge.⁸⁵⁰ It seems, however, that 'positive deconstruction' should be seen as an equally legitimate (and to some extent similar) strategy.

⁸⁴⁹ McGrath has more recently admitted that "it is not quite as simple as Bloesch suggests" (McGrath, A. 2000b:33). Accordingly, Carson claims that the dismissal of *Henry* as a 'Christian rationalist' "tends to be sloganeering" (Carson 1996b:187). Such a dismissal of Henry is also questioned in Brand 1999 and Groothuis 2000:116,120-127. *Montgomery's* strong evidentialism may be controversial, but it seems inappropriate – e.g. in view of his seminal "The Theologians Craft" (Montgomery 1970) and his recent "The Holy Spirit and the Defence of the Faith" (Montgomery 1997) – to describe him as a rationalist. The inclusion of *Schaeffer* among supposed evangelical rationalists seems surprising, since McGrath elsewhere refers to him with approval for "some important comments on the limitations of rationality" (McGrath 1992a:267; see Schaeffer 1990:123-125). Schaeffer's contribution to the discussion on apologetics, rationalism and rationality should also be noticed in this context; see Schaeffer 1990:175-187. *Geisler's* neo-Thomistic approach may be controversial, but contrary to rationalism he claims a) that faith is never based on reason but (at best) only supported by reason or evidence and b) that the truths of faith (while not going against reason) surpasses reason (see Geisler 1999:88,243,337,409).

⁸⁵⁰ Sire offers a similar strategy; cf. Sire 1995 and Sire 2000.

Secondly, neither author develops the postmodern experience (McGrath) of ‘a deconstructed self’ as a vital point of contact for arguing for the relevance and attractiveness of God. This is a key element, though, in some other recent apologetic proposals.⁸⁵¹ Such an approach would emphasize key elements in ‘the biblical storyline’ (Carson) – *both* about the nature and authority of God *and* the nature and accountability of humanity – as the basis for arguing that a ‘decentred’ and ‘destabilized’ postmodern self may be rescued and reconstituted.⁸⁵²

Thirdly, neither McGrath nor Carson develops appropriate justification procedures for apologetics in the postmodern context.

Fourthly, it remains to see whether McGrath’s and Carson’s applications of Acts 17:16-34 to the postmodern challenge are consistent with their proposals.

6.3 A Critical Review of McGrath’s and Carson’s Apologetic Use of Acts 17:16-34 in Relation to the Postmodern Challenge

The preceding discussion has indicated that Alister E. McGrath and Donald A. Carson both consider Acts 17:16-34 as a key text in apologetics (see 6.2.2) and the postmodern challenge as highly significant (see 6.2.3). This section presents a comparative analysis and critique of their specific applications of this biblical passage to the postmodern challenge.

⁸⁵¹ This theme is emphasized – in various ways – in Thiselton 1995, Cook 1996:42-47, and Chang 2000:160-172.

The focus is on *whether* (and in that case *to what extent*) a) the Acts 17 and the postmodern contexts are comparable and b) Paul's apologetic approach, arguments and aims in Athens are valid and relevant in a postmodern context.

6.3.1 McGrath on applying Acts 17:16-34 to the postmodern challenge: An analysis

McGrath claims that the Acts 17 and the postmodern contexts to a certain extent are comparable, since both contexts are characterized by *biblical illiteracy*.⁸⁵³ Accordingly, McGrath considers the issues of intelligibility and authority as major challenges both for Paul as apologist in the pagan Acts 17 context and for the contemporary apologist in a postmodern context. McGrath adds, however, that the present-day collapse in biblical knowledge positively implies that an inherited aversion towards the Christian faith increasingly seems to be absent.⁸⁵⁴

McGrath maintains that Paul's general apologetic approach in Athens (see 6.2.2.1) – of addressing the specific audience, identifying relevant authorities, using relevant lines of argument, and making people want to hear more – is appropriate also in a postmodern context. For the contemporary apologist, this means acquiring a sufficient understanding of a given postmodern audience in terms of its degree of biblical illiteracy, its relevant

⁸⁵² See further 6.3.4.3.

⁸⁵³ McGrath seems also (more implicitly) to presuppose pluralism as a common characteristic of the two contexts.

⁸⁵⁴ See esp. McGrath, A. 2000c.

authorities, and potential points of contact.⁸⁵⁵ Due to the characteristic postmodern features of pluralism (see 6.2.3.1) and “fragmentation”⁸⁵⁶, this may lead to the apologetic use of a diversity of relevant material and authorities.⁸⁵⁷

McGrath claims that Paul’s use of significant points of contact in his arguments (see 6.2.2.1) is both valid and relevant in a postmodern context, and suggests *experience* (as indicated in 6.2.3.1) as a key point of contact in a postmodern setting. McGrath interprets experience as follows:

1. In the popular apologetic *The Unknown God*, the experience of ‘*a sense of longing*’ (for meaning and personal fulfilment) is explored in depth.⁸⁵⁸ The postmodern experience – of looking for meaning and relevance but not finding it – is connected with the deep sense of human restlessness. Such significant “signals of transcendence”⁸⁵⁹ – together with the postmodern openness to ‘stories’ – are in a postmodern context seen as a basis for introducing the attractiveness and relevance of the gospel “of a God who can *and wants* to be known... What if he offered to give us that which we have been searching for, but have never found?”⁸⁶⁰ On the one hand, McGrath sees such points of contact as intended for “individuals who sense God’s creative power”⁸⁶¹, on the other hand, they are claimed to

⁸⁵⁵ See esp. McGrath, A. 2000c.

⁸⁵⁶ McGrath, A. 1996:199.

⁸⁵⁷ Cf. esp. McGrath, A. 2000c and McGrath, A. 2000e.

⁸⁵⁸ McGrath, A. 1999f:7-71.

⁸⁵⁹ McGrath accredits P. Berger for this expression; see Berger 1969:61-94, McGrath, A. 1992:18, and McGrath, A. 1998f:4.

⁸⁶⁰ See McGrath, A. 1999f:71.

⁸⁶¹ McGrath, A. 1998c:262.

“create receptivity to theism”⁸⁶². This appeal to the experience of ‘a sense of longing’ may thus be seen as an application of Paul’s ‘natural theology argument’.

2. McGrath also touches on the experience of ‘*a sense of anxiety*’ as a significant point of contact in ‘postmodern apologetics’ for the Christian message of real hope, “grounded in the bedrock of the Resurrection”⁸⁶³.

McGrath claims that Paul’s ‘Resurrection argument’ is relevant to the New Age challenge⁸⁶⁴, which he (as indicated in 6.2.3.1) considers to be closely related to the postmodern challenge. He develops three ways in which *the resurrection of Christ* – as for the Athenians – “may hold the key to engagement with New Agers”⁸⁶⁵: *First*, in the light of New Age interest in near-death experience, the claim that Jesus has returned from death (with experience of death and beyond) would imply that he should get attention. *Secondly*, the resurrection establishes (in ‘quasi-New Age language’) that “Christ has broken through into the realm of transcendent knowing, making it knowable and available”⁸⁶⁶. *Thirdly*, the resurrection shows “that Christ has some superiority over the rest of us when it comes to knowing spiritual reality”⁸⁶⁷.

⁸⁶² McGrath, A. 1998c:264.

⁸⁶³ McGrath, A. 2000c; see also McGrath, A. 1999f:105-106.

⁸⁶⁴ McGrath claims that Acts 17:16-34, as a key New Testament account of a Christian encounter with classical paganism, is esp. relevant to the New Age challenge. See McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:77.

⁸⁶⁵ McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:79.

⁸⁶⁶ McGrath, A. 1992a:234 and McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:78.

⁸⁶⁷ McGrath, A. 1992a:234 and McGrath, A. & Green, M. 1993:80.

More recently, however, in *The Unknown God*, McGrath applies similar arguments more generally in relation to any (postmodern) seekers: *First*, the argument that “only someone who has been to that great beyond and returned to tell the tale is to be trusted.”⁸⁶⁸ *Secondly*, “what if someone were to enter into a realm that lies beyond, and return to take us with him into this new and wonderful realm?”⁸⁶⁹ Paul’s argumentative appeal to the Resurrection in Acts 17 is thus considered by McGrath to be a valid and relevant model for apologetics to popular postmodernism.

McGrath claims that Paul’s aim in Acts 17 of *generating interest* is valid and relevant in a postmodern context. For the contemporary apologist, this means introducing the attractiveness and coherence of the Christian faith in such a way that postmodern people want to hear more.⁸⁷⁰ There is also an implicit link to Paul’s other aims in Acts 17 of *persuading* and *confronting*, when McGrath applies Schaeffer’s apologetic approach to non-Christian worldviews⁸⁷¹ to postmodernism (see 6.2.3.1).

This analysis has shown that McGrath claims that a) the Acts 17 and the postmodern contexts are comparable in terms of biblical illiteracy (and possibly also in terms of pluralism), b) Paul’s approach – of using relevant material, relevant authorities and

⁸⁶⁸ McGrath, A. 1999f:101.

⁸⁶⁹ McGrath, A. 1999f:104.

⁸⁷⁰ McGrath, A. 2000c.

⁸⁷¹ Schaeffer’s apologetic approach is based on the conviction that Acts 14:15-17, Acts 17:16-34 and Rom. 1:18-2:16 provide the contemporary Christian apologist with an appropriate approach to ‘the man without the Bible’ (cf. Schaeffer 1969:79-105 and Schaeffer 1990:123,133,182). The emphasis, however, is on Paul’s argument in Rom. 1-2, “where he can develop his argument at ease” (Schaeffer 1969:79). This significant implicit link to Acts 17 and the parallel passages.

relevant lines of arguments – is appropriate also in a postmodern context, c) Paul's use of points of contact is a significant role model for the contemporary apologist's use of postmodern experience (esp. of 'a sense of longing' and 'a sense of anxiety'), d) Paul's appeal to the Resurrection is a paradigm for apologetics to popular postmodernism (e.g. as found in New Age religiosity), and e) Paul's aim of generating interest is significant in a postmodern context.

6.3.2 Carson on applying Acts 17:16-34 to the postmodern challenge: An analysis

Carson claims that the Acts 17 and the postmodern contexts to a certain extent are comparable, since both contexts are characterized by pluralism (with a number of influential worldviews “far removed from that of the Judeo-Christian tradition”⁸⁷²) and biblical illiteracy. Accordingly, Carson considers the presence of “various non-Christian frames of reference”⁸⁷³ and ignorance of biblical data as major challenges both for Paul as evangelist-apologist in the pagan Acts 17 context and for the contemporary apologist in a postmodern context. There is, however, according to Carson, “at least one fundamental difference between Paul's situation and ours... We sometimes deal with [biblical illiterates] who have adopted a worldview that is not only at several points profoundly antithetical to a

however, is not brought out in McGrath's discussions.

⁸⁷² Carson 1996b:496.

⁸⁷³ Carson 2000a:386.

biblical worldview but also self-consciously chosen over against that biblical worldview”⁸⁷⁴.

Carson maintains that Paul’s approach – when faced with such a context – is significant. The apostle *presents and defends the ‘big story’ of the Bible*, thus challenging the listeners’ worldviews.⁸⁷⁵ In the same way, “we need to confront the postmodern worldview with the big story of the Bible ... the story of Jesus ... within the Bible’s metanarrative”⁸⁷⁶, since “without the big story, without the metanarrative, the little story or the little expression becomes either incoherent or positively misleading”⁸⁷⁷. Carson’s concern is, that whatever communicative bridges are used to relate to postmodernism, “all such bridges must sooner or later set the gospel within a particular worldview”⁸⁷⁸. For Carson, then, as indicated in 6.2.2.2, Acts 17 shows the need for the contemporary apologist to think ‘worldviewishly’.

Carson claims that Paul’s argument about *sin* (i.e. ‘the ultimate authority argument’) is highly relevant in a postmodern context. Carson maintains that the postmodern notions of sin, good and evil as social constructs (see 6.3.2.2) must be challenged on the basis of “the Bible’s big story line, which spells out the concept of sin, i.e. that God made us and we

⁸⁷⁴ Carson 2000a:391.

⁸⁷⁵ See Carson 1995b:156; Carson 1996b:501,503; Carson 1998b:2-3; Carson 2000a:394-395; and Carson 2000b:22.

⁸⁷⁶ Carson 1998b:1,3. Carson maintains that “this insistence on establishing a biblical/theological framework does not in itself dictate the style of approach, or the point of entry” (Carson 1996b:504-505). This general observation, however, does not prevent Carson from identifying specific ‘Acts 17 approaches’ and applying them to a postmodern context.

⁸⁷⁷ Carson 2000a:395.

owe him”⁸⁷⁹. He points out that sin “at root [is] a defiance of God’s authority, a deeply rooted self-centeredness at enmity with God and his claims”⁸⁸⁰. Carson claims accordingly, that atheism “in the last analysis [is]...a defiant and stubborn rebellion...[A] lust for autonomy that refuses to recognize the rights of our Maker and our obligations to him.”⁸⁸¹

He maintains further, that postmodern atheist Foucault exemplifies this when he “frankly acknowledges that it became important to him to destroy traditional notions of truth and morality because he wishes to justify his own sexual conduct”⁸⁸². Thus, over against such postmodern relativism Carson applies key parts of ‘the ultimate authority argument’ as a justification of Christian truth claims about sin and divine judgment.

This application of ‘the ultimate authority argument’ illustrates that Carson primarily focuses on Paul’s aim in Acts 17 of *confronting*. Thus, he maintains that, when relating to postmoderns, the primary focus is not *how to get back into the discussion* (i.e. generating interest) but *where the discussion goes* (i.e. challenging and confronting the postmodern worldview)⁸⁸³. This implies that contemporary apologist-evangelists need to know where to

⁸⁷⁸ Carson 1996b:505.

⁸⁷⁹ Carson 1998b:3.

⁸⁸⁰ Carson 1995c:35.

⁸⁸¹ Carson 1999, on August 11.

⁸⁸² Carson 1999, on August 11. On the other hand, Carson argues that the human need for a basis for morality may open up postmodernists to the Christian view of sin (see Carson 1998b:3-4).

⁸⁸³ Carson claims that many Christians largely seem to be concerned with how to get (back) into a conversation with postmoderns (cf. Carson 1998b:3), but he defines the crucial question as “whether the Christian witness has a clear, relatively simple, straightforward grasp of what the Bible’s story line is, how it must give form to a worldview, and how the wonderful news of the gospel fits powerfully into this true story – all told in such a way that men and women can see its

go in relation to postmoderns – “that is to a point where people grasp that we are sinful before a holy God and need to be forgiven”⁸⁸⁴. Thus, whereas Carson seems to consider ‘to interest’ and ‘to persuade’ as legitimate but subordinate aims in a postmodern context, the aim ‘to confront’ is seen as primary.

This analysis has shown that Carson claims that a) the Acts 17 and the postmodern contexts are comparable in terms of pluralism and biblical illiteracy, b) Paul’s approach – as an evangelist-apologist – of presenting and defending the Bible’s story-line as a challenging worldview is highly appropriate in a postmodern context, c) Paul’s argument about sin (i.e. God made us and we owe him) is a significant model for the contemporary evangelist-apologist when faced with postmodern objections to sin as a social construct, and d) Paul’s aim of confronting other worldviews is primary in a postmodern context.

6.3.3 Carson and McGrath on applying Acts 17:16-34 to the postmodern challenge: Commonalities and differences

McGrath and Carson share common views on the application of Acts 17:16-34 to the postmodern challenge in a number of areas. *First*, both authors claim that the Acts 17 and the postmodern *contexts* to a certain extent are comparable, at least in terms of biblical illiteracy, but possibly also in terms of religious pluralism. *Secondly*, McGrath and Carson both maintain that Paul’s general *approach* in Athens – as an evangelist-apologist in a

relevance, power, truthfulness, and life-changing capacity” (Carson 2000a:398).
⁸⁸⁴ Carson 1998b:1. See also Carson 1995b:149-150,156 and Carson 2000a:398.

pluralistic, biblically illiterate context – is applicable in a postmodern context. McGrath would thus largely agree with Carson's claim that Acts 17:16-34, as an example of New Testament responses to the pluralism of the first century, "can be applied with relative directness to the analogous pluralism of our day"⁸⁸⁵. *Thirdly*, and following on from this, both authors consider one or more of Paul's specific *arguments* to be valid and relevant over against postmodernism. *Fourthly*, both McGrath and Carson consider Paul's *aims* as legitimate in a postmodern context.

There are also some areas where McGrath and Carson differ in their views on applying Acts 17:16-34 to the postmodern challenge. *First*, they differ in their *contextual understanding*. While McGrath emphasizes an increasing absence of inherited aversion towards Christianity in the postmodern context, Carson points to the possible presence of anti-Christian attitudes in the contemporary setting. *Secondly*, they differ in expressions and emphases regarding the application of Paul's *approach* in a postmodern context. Whereas McGrath focuses on Paul's 'audience sensitivity' and the relevance of the apostle's bridgebuilding, Carson emphasizes Paul's 'worldview sensitivity' and the significance of the apostle's defence of 'the biblical story-line'. *Thirdly*, they differ in their selection and application of Paul's *arguments*. While McGrath selects Paul's 'natural theology argument' and 'the Resurrection argument' and to some extent develops them for postmodern seekers, Carson focuses on Paul's 'ultimate authority argument' and to some extent develops it over against postmodern objections to the biblical concepts of sin and

⁸⁸⁵ Carson 1996b:496; cf. also McGrath, A. 1998f:6. See also 6.3.2.

divine judgment. *Fourthly*, and following on from the previous points, they differ in their perspectives on Paul's *aims*. McGrath's focus on bridgebuilding and points of contact naturally leads to an emphasis on 'generating interest', so that postmoderns may want to hear more about the Christian faith. Carson's focus on the biblical metanarrative over against other worldviews, on the other hand, naturally results in a stress on 'confronting', so that postmoderns may be challenged to commit themselves to the Christian faith.

6.3.4 Carson and McGrath on applying Acts 17:16-34 to the postmodern challenge: A critique

6.3.4.1 Comparable contexts?

It seems appropriate of McGrath and Carson to stress *biblical illiteracy and pluralism* as two common characteristics of the Acts 17 and the postmodern contexts. The modern processes of secularization and pluralization have created a post-Christian setting in the contemporary (Western) world, with a) a decrease both in knowledge of the Bible and in the belief in its authority and b) a widespread influence from a number of secular and religious alternatives to the Christian worldview. It has also been suggested that there are some striking parallels – in terms of content – between the ancient Athenian beliefs of popular piety, Stoicism and Epicureanism *and* some contemporary worldviews.⁸⁸⁶ This

⁸⁸⁶ It has been suggested a) that the polytheistic superstitious reaching for an unknown god to some extent corresponds to popular superstitious and occult beliefs (with their emphases on various 'safety precautions') in the postmodern context and b) that the postmodern counterpart of the Stoic pantheistic 'reducing of God' may be found in various New Age ways of thinking, whereas the parallel to Epicurean deistic 'removal of God' may be found in the 'practical atheism'

post-Christian context has appropriately been described as neo-pagan.⁸⁸⁷ *These observations indicate that the Acts 17 and the postmodern contexts to a significant extent may be seen as comparable in terms of biblical illiteracy and pluralism.*

These common characteristics, however, need to be balanced against some key features of discontinuity related to the contemporary context in general and to postmodernism specifically. *First*, as indicated by Carson (see 6.3.2), there is the significant difference between the 'pre-Christian' Acts 17 context and the 'post-Christian' context of the contemporary Western world. *Secondly*, there is the considerable difference between the 'pre-modern' ancient Acts 17 context and the 'post-modern' contemporary Western context. *Thirdly*, whereas the Acts 17 context (at least according to the Lucan narrative) seems to have been unambiguously a religious context, the postmodern context is an ambiguous context of competing secular *and* religious beliefs and claims. *Fourthly*, there is the significant difference between the traditional emphasis on *logos* and rationality in ancient Athens and the postmodern distrust of reason and emphasis on *pathos*.

of many Westerners. (See esp. Prior, K. 1995 and Proctor 1992.) Bruce observes accordingly: "Stoicism and Epicureanism represented alternative attempts in pre-Christian paganism to come to terms with life, especially in times of uncertainty and hardship, and post-Christian paganism down to our own day has not been able to devise anything appreciably better" (Bruce 1988:331) This corresponds to the claim that "like Paul, Christians today are locked in debate with both Epicureans and Stoics" (Clark & Geisler 1990:7; quoted in McGrath, A. 1992a:231).

⁸⁸⁷ N. T. Wright claims that since the Western world is moving towards new forms of paganism, the contemporary church needs to analyze Paul's message to the pagan world in order to rediscover the way in which the Gospel really is good news for a postmodern, neo-pagan world (see Wright 1997:94). For a brief critique of key 'neo-pagan' beliefs, see Wilkinson 2000.

These discontinuous features are largely missing in McGrath and Carson's discussions, but need to be taken into account if the Acts 17 model is to be appropriately applied to the postmodern challenge.

6.3.4.2 A relevant approach?

This thesis describes Paul's approach in Athens in terms of a) contextual understanding (5.4.2.3), b) application of appropriate justification procedures (5.4.2.4), and c) 'positive deconstruction' of alternative worldviews (5.4.2.5). McGrath and Carson's applications of Acts 17 relate to all three aspects.

a) McGrath and Carson's applications of Acts 17 to the postmodern challenge are largely characterized by a proper contextual understanding of the postmodern context. This includes both the identification of biblical illiteracy and pluralism as common characteristics of the Acts 17 and the postmodern contexts (see 6.3.4.1) and the analysis of postmodernism as a significant contemporary *alternative* to the Christian faith (see 6.2.3). Thus, despite significant limitations in their cultural critiques of the postmodern phenomena (as noted in 6.2.3.4), both authors appropriately describe the postmodern challenge to Christian apologetics as an ambiguous combination of openness to any personal stories/beliefs and dismissal of any absolute truth-claims.⁸⁸⁸ Neither author.

⁸⁸⁸ This analysis may be developed as follows: Whereas arguments for 'the epistemic permission' of Christian truth claims to a large extent seem more acceptable in a postmodern – than in a modern – context, arguments for 'the epistemic obligation' of Christian truth claims seem to have become even more of a *scandalon* in the postmodern context.

however, offers an in-depth assessment of how philosophical postmodernism influences common contemporary *questions and objections* to Christian truth claims.⁸⁸⁹

b) McGrath and Carson's applications of Acts 17 to the postmodern context are to some extent characterized by *the application of appropriate justification procedures*. This may be expressed both in terms of their awareness of the postmodern setting as an 'agora context' (even though neither author uses this terminology) and their implicit applications of two criteria of truth:

(1) The awareness of the marketplace character of the postmodern setting leads for both authors, as shown in 6.2.3, to a legitimate emphasis on the need to establish common ground with postmodernism, e.g. through the use of relevant material.

(2) The two authors' implicit application of two criteria of truth seems to be as follows: *First*, both authors apply the criterion of 'pragmatic relevance and adequacy'. McGrath explores the postmodern experience of 'a sense of longing' and 'a sense of anxiety' as significant points of contact, which show the attractiveness and relevance of Christian truth claims about the Creator and the Resurrection. Carson's argument, on the other hand, is that postmodern notions of morality and sin negatively point to the need for a biblical view of 'ultimate authority' and forgiveness.

⁸⁸⁹ For some insightful suggestions, see Sampson 2000:153-161 on 'modern myths in a postmodern world'. Cf. also Hinkson & Ganssle 2000:85-87.

Secondly, both authors apply the criterion of '*consistency and coherence*'. McGrath argues that the specific, extraordinary claims of Jesus about the afterlife (see 6.3.1) make sense in the light of his Resurrection. Carson, on the other hand, argues that the biblical storyline constitutes a coherent worldview, which makes sense of individual Christian truth claims.

McGrath and Carson's applications of these two criteria seem appropriate and are consistent with their proposals for apologetics (see 6.2.3).

Thirdly, neither author seems to apply the criterion of '*correspondence with reality*' in their explicit uses of Acts 17. This may be due to underlying factors such as McGrath's hesitance towards the correspondence theory of truth (see 6.2.3.1) and Carson's preference for presuppositionalism (see 6.2.1.2). However, the following section on the relevance of Paul's arguments will indicate some key areas where an application of this criterion seems appropriate – and to some extent unavoidable – in a postmodern context (see 6.3.4.3).⁸⁹⁰

c) McGrath and Carson's apologetic approaches to postmodernism are to a significant extent in practice characterized by *the 'positive deconstruction'* of the postmodern worldview, even though neither author uses this terminology nor argues this explicitly on

⁸⁹⁰ It should be noted that the utilization of these criteria of truth as appropriate justification procedures in a postmodern context does not decide the communicative mode of apologetics, which may vary considerably in order to fit the personality of the apologist, the form of the occasion, and the relevant questions and objections.

the basis of Acts 17. This implies, as shown in 6.2.3, that both McGrath⁸⁹¹ and Carson affirm truths and expose errors in postmodernism:

a) Elements of *truth* include part of the postmodern critique of modernity (including some key epistemological and hermeneutical insights)⁸⁹² and the postmodern openness towards ‘the epistemic permission’ of any personal beliefs. It would also have been appropriate of McGrath and Carson to include the telling postmodern description of the seemingly dominant contemporary cultural and personal experience and mood among the elements of truth in postmodernism.⁸⁹³

b) Along with a number of other contemporary apologists⁸⁹⁴, both McGrath and Carson have appropriately identified and exposed relativism as a crucial vulnerability (or *error*) within both philosophical and popular postmodernism, arguing that relativism is self-referentially incoherent. Carson has also identified and critiqued the epistemological scepticism and the naturalism of philosophical postmodernism as inadequate frames of

⁸⁹¹ As noted in 6.3.1, McGrath’s use of Schaeffer’s ‘worldview criticism’ (see Veith 1994:64) is significant in this context.

⁸⁹² Sire observes accordingly: “[As] apologists, we can accept much of the postmodern critique of modernity. It properly identifies and sometimes destroys the pretensions of an Enlightenment *logos* – a *logos* that assumes that people in the exercise of their ordinary mental faculties can grasp the truth truly and certainly. That kind of ability has not been ours as human beings from at least the time of the fall.” (Sire 1995:119)

⁸⁹³ An insightful summary of this postmodern ‘mood’ is found in Cook 1996:30-31; see also McGregor 1994 and Lyon 2000.

⁸⁹⁴ See e.g. Cook 1996:167-170, Copan 1998:11-90, Cowan 2000:376, Guinness 2000:100-104, Griffiths, P. 1991:31-36, Keyes 1999:71-85, Lyon 2000:54, and Netland 1991b:166-180.

reference. It would also have been appropriate of McGrath and Carson to challenge the subjectivism of both philosophical and popular postmodernism.⁸⁹⁵

However, such a ‘positive deconstruction’ of postmodernism *may be argued for explicitly on the basis of the Acts 17 model* (see 5.4.2.5), thus enabling the contemporary Christian apologist to approach this contemporary worldview as Paul approached Stoicism and Epicureanism, i.e. as a ‘*half-truth*’⁸⁹⁶. This implies arguing that postmodernism should be seen as fundamentally inconsistent, failing to correspond to reality in key areas, and inadequate as a way of living.

*These critical observations indicate that McGrath and Carson’s apologetic approaches to postmodernism to some extent implicitly reflect Paul’s apologetic approach in Athens of contextual understanding, application of appropriate justification procedures, and ‘positive deconstruction’ of alternative worldviews. However, this section has suggested that a more explicit and comprehensive application of Paul’s approach needs to be developed.*⁸⁹⁷

⁸⁹⁵ For some suggestions, cf. Cook 1996:34 and Craig 1994:168.

⁸⁹⁶ Guinness notes accordingly, that “modernism and postmodernism both have their insights, but both are ... equally inadequate half-truths” (Guinness 1994a:107).

⁸⁹⁷ In contrast to a number of ancient Athenian worldviews, postmodernism seems to treat any apologetics as an oppressive and manipulative activity (see 6.1.2). McGrath and Carson do not seem to address this key objection sufficiently. This postmodern objection, however, may be dealt with as follows. a) The *making* of truth claims is *unavoidable*, as indicated by the critique of postmodern relativism as self-referentially incoherent. The corresponding rational *justification* of truth claims is an integral and necessary part of any argumentative discourse; b) Truth claims are *not manipulative per se*, when presented in an open and non-coercive manner. Thus, covert forms of persuasive communication (such as advertising and other similar forms of media discourse) are much more likely to be manipulative than traditional apologetic discourse; c) The *mutual dialogue and critique* on competing truth claims between representatives of alternative worldviews seem significant for the public and private discourse in a pluralistic society (cf. Griffiths, P. 1991 and

6.3.4.3 *Relevant arguments?*

This thesis describes Paul's arguments in Athens as a) 'the natural theology argument' (5.4.2.7), b) 'the ultimate authority argument' (5.4.2.8), and c) 'the Resurrection argument' (5.4.2.9). To some extent, McGrath and Carson's contributions may be seen as valid partial applications of one or more of these arguments to the postmodern challenge, with an emphasis *either* on natural theology and Resurrection (McGrath) *or* on ultimate authority (Carson).

a) McGrath argues that the postmodern experience of 'a sense of longing' points to and is fulfilled in a God who can and wants to be known (6.3.1). This application of Paul's 'natural theology argument' seems legitimate but incomplete. A more adequate application, however, would have to address key issues related to the justification of Christian claims about 1) humanity, 2) the universe, and 3) God. Some of these issues are indicated in the following:

(1) The postmodern experience of 'a deconstructed and decentred self' (see 6.1.2 and 6.2.3.4) constitutes a significant point of contact for Christian claims about fundamental human identity in God (17:28). However, such claims about the adequacy of a Christian *view of humanity* would have to be justified over against the postmodern re-construction of

identities (which takes place, as Lyon points out, through various meaning-routes such as ‘the plastic self’, ‘the expressive self’, and ‘the subsumed self’⁸⁹⁸).

(2) Popular postmodernism claims to be open to the exploration of any secular and religious ‘story’. Due to this curiosity and an increasing biblical illiteracy, such postmodernists may thus be interested in a Christian *view of the universe*. If so, arguments on ‘the ordering of the world’ and ‘the beauty of the world’ (cf. 6.2.1.1 and 6.2.2.4), as indicators of a personal Creator and Sustainer, need to be developed for postmodern seekers.

(3) The original ‘natural theology argument’ seems to presuppose a context of competing religious claims, or at least openness to ‘signals of transcendence’ (McGrath). This would imply that over against a thoroughly secular perspective, such as the naturalism of philosophical postmodernism, Paul’s ‘natural theology argument’ would have to be extended to include arguments for the existence of a personal Creator. Despite their disputed status (cf. 6.2.1)⁸⁹⁹, such arguments may (if argued non-coercively) present a challenge to postmodern naturalists to consider the possibility and plausibility of a Judeo-Christian *view of God*.⁹⁰⁰ This presupposes that the apologist can show that these arguments

⁸⁹⁸ See Lyon 2000:91-96; cf. also McGregor 1994 and Cook 1996:15-19.

⁸⁹⁹ It should be noted that neither McGrath nor Carson makes an explicit use of traditional theistic arguments (cf. 6.2.1). See, however, the defence of the possibility and plausibility of a natural theology in Geivett 1993:90-139.

⁹⁰⁰ A prominent recent example would be Craig’s exposition (e.g. in Craig 1994:91-122; Craig 2000:11-19) of the *kalam* cosmological argument: “1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause. 2. The universe began to exist. 3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.” See also the rigorous critique of philosophical naturalism in Craig & Moreland 2000.

are more than Christian linguistic and social constructs and don't mask a Christian play for power.

b) Carson argues that the argument 'God made us and we owe him' justifies a Christian view of sin and divine judgment over against postmodern notions of morality and sin as social constructs (6.3.2). This is a legitimate application of key parts of Paul's 'ultimate authority argument'. A more adequate application, however, would have to address key issues related to the justification of Christian claims about divine authority 1) as legitimate and 2) as obliging humanity. Some of these issues are indicated in the following:

(1) In view of postmodern suspicion of (absolute) authority⁹⁰¹, *legitimacy* becomes a key issue for the justification of Christian claims regarding divine ultimate authority. The argument that the Sovereign Author of life has a legitimate authority over life, as Carson argues in his valid application of Paul's argument, may have to be supplemented in a postmodern context with an argument for the non-manipulative nature of God's claim to

⁹⁰¹ See e.g. Bauckham 1999:1,8-9; Lyon 2000:39,41; and Cook 1996:27,165. The postmodern approach to authority has been characterized as "the questioning of all attempts to ground authority on any absolute foundation, whether that of religion or reason... The general thrust of postmodernism... is the recognition that authority is constituted through the shifting and contextual uses of power, such that its legitimacy does not transparently derive from either natural right or rational consent." (Hayden 2001:23,24) This postmodern attitude may be related to "human fear of losing human lordship over human decisions and life" (Moser 2000:28).

ultimate authority. A number of contemporary apologists and theologians would emphasize that ‘the theology of the cross’ constitutes a legitimate basis for such an argument.⁹⁰²

(2) In view of the subtle religious shift from obligation to consumption in the postmodern context⁹⁰³, *obligation* becomes another key issue for the justification of Christian claims regarding divine ultimate authority. As indicated by Carson (see 6.3.2), the meaning and basis of human morality seem to constitute significant points of contact in this context. This would imply that a sequential argument may need to be developed, where a) moral obligations to ‘neighbours’ are shown to be inevitable also in a consumerist culture, b) such moral obligations are shown to be objective (and thus point to the non-relativistic nature of morality), and c) this objective morality is shown to have a plausible basis in the nature of God as the divine Lawgiver.⁹⁰⁴ Thus, ‘moral obligation’ would make sense both in relation to ‘the neighbour’ and (ultimately) to God.

c) McGrath argues that the postmodern experience of ‘a sense of anxiety’ is a significant point of contact for claims about the Resurrection, and he also develops an argument for postmodern seekers on the basis of the Resurrection (6.3.1). These are

⁹⁰² “In the face of postmodern critiques of the notion of power, the *theologia crucis* is a protest against forms of relationship between people, or between people and God, which are based primarily on manipulative power rather than love.” (Tomlin 1997:71; cf. also Middleton & Walsh 1995; Thiselton 1995:21-27; Vanhoozer 1998:453-468.)

⁹⁰³ This is amply documented in Lyon 2000.

⁹⁰⁴ For various parts of this argument, see Henriksen 1999:116-144; Cook 1996:45-47, 167-170; Zacharias 2000c:34-37; and Craig 1997. An alternative, more direct approach would be to argue that the fact of God’s judgment, in addition to being a threat to humanity, also affirms human value, gives humanity an identity, and awards humanity with responsibility (see Henriksen 1999:102-113 and Thiselton 2000:436).

legitimate applications of key parts of Paul's '*Resurrection argument*'. A more adequate application, however, would have to address key issues related to the justification of Christian claims about the Resurrection as 1) resonating with ultimate human concerns, 2) indicating the uniqueness and authority of Jesus, and 3) being based on sufficient, available evidence. Some of these issues are indicated in the following:

(1) The claim that the Resurrection *resonates with ultimate human concerns* need to be justified in the context of ambiguous postmodern attitudes to life, where anxiety, longing and restlessness (McGrath's emphasis) seem to exist alongside cynicism, irony and 'nihilism with a smile'⁹⁰⁵. This means that a 'positive deconstruction' of the latter views may need to be developed, where the application of an argumentative strategy of 'relativizing the relativizers' seems appropriate: "By this is meant applying to skeptics the skepticism they apply to others, thus pushing them out toward the negative consequences of their own beliefs."⁹⁰⁶ If so, the "absurdity and despair"⁹⁰⁷ of postmodernism becomes apparent. This may lead to an increased appreciation of the adequacy of the 'Resurrection hope' for humanity in a postmodern context of fading or lost hopes.⁹⁰⁸

(2) The claim that 'the Resurrection argument' *indicates the uniqueness and authority of Jesus* needs to be justified in the context of a widespread, continuous interest in Jesus as a

⁹⁰⁵ For the latter expression, see Sampson 1994:30; on postmodern cynicism and irony, see e.g. Cook 1996:19-20 and Hinkson & Ganssle 2000:85-86.

⁹⁰⁶ Guinness 2000:101. Guinness refers to Berger 1969, but the same approach is also found in Schaeffer 1990:134. This is also evident from the applications of Schaeffer's arguments by Guinness (see 5.3.2.2) and McGrath (see 6.2.3.1).

⁹⁰⁷ Craig 1994:70.

figure of identification and legitimation for a number of worldviews.⁹⁰⁹ In view of postmodern explorations of various perspectives, the Christian ‘story’ of Jesus (as found in the New Testament Gospels) must be shown as coherent and attractive over against such competing ‘Jesus-stories’. This may imply that the evidential basis for the various ‘stories’ is seen as a key issue, over against popular postmodern claims about the irrelevance of history.⁹¹⁰

(3) Neither McGrath nor Carson assesses the evidential force of the Resurrection in a postmodern context. However, the claim that ‘the Resurrection argument’ *is based on sufficient, available evidence* needs to be justified over against the historical relativism (i.e. the non-realism and the non-objectivism) of philosophical postmodernism. If the general credibility of historical knowledge is established over against this view⁹¹¹, then the specific case for the historicity of the Resurrection may be argued⁹¹². Even though ‘the Resurrection argument’ seems preferable in a context of competing theistic truth claims⁹¹³, it may even present a challenge to philosophical postmodernism⁹¹⁴ when argued on the basis of a

⁹⁰⁸ On ‘Resurrection hope’ in a postmodern context, see Bauckham & Hart 1999.

⁹⁰⁹ For various secular and religious views of Jesus, see Osborn 1992:143-152; Stott 1992:19-23; Chapman 1995:237-244; and Davidsen 1998:23-39.

⁹¹⁰ See Craig 1994:158.

⁹¹¹ For such a justification, see Craig 1994:166-190 and Geisler 1999:320-330.

⁹¹² See esp. Craig 1988; Craig 1994:272-298; Craig 1998; Craig in Copan & Tacelli 2000:162-206; Habermas 1980; Habermas in Geivett & Habermas 1997:262-275; and Habermas in Cowan 2000:106-116.

⁹¹³ Following Craig 1985, Carson claims that *miracles* enjoy certain evidential force when “made in the face of competing *theistic* claims” (Carson 1986:373).

⁹¹⁴ This is claimed by Carson (in connection with Paul’s rhetorical question in Acts 26:8): “To people with naturalistic outlooks today, the same question remains a challenge: dismissal of the category of resurrection stems from an earlier dismissal of the God of the Bible. Granted the God of the Bible, why is the category of resurrection so difficult?” (Carson 1999, on Jan. 26)

‘minimal facts approach’⁹¹⁵. Thus understood, ‘the Resurrection argument’ would have a vital role in establishing the credibility of the Christian worldview in a postmodern context.⁹¹⁶

These critical observations indicate that McGrath and Carson have presented helpful applications of parts of Paul’s arguments, but also that neither author has developed these arguments comprehensively and contextually. Even though these partial applications illustrate the possibility of applying Paul’s arguments in Acts 17 in a postmodern context, this section has outlined a number of key issues that need to be addressed if Paul’s arguments are to be considered properly valid and relevant in a postmodern context.

6.3.4.4 Relevant aims?

This thesis describes ‘to interest’, ‘to persuade’, and ‘to confront’ as Paul’s three aims in Athens (5.4.2.10). McGrath and Carson’s applications of Acts 17 relate to two of these aims, with a focus either on the first (McGrath) or the third (Carson). These contributions are critiqued in the following.

⁹¹⁵ This implies using as historically established evidence only those reported facts in the Gospels that are accepted by a majority of contemporary critical scholars, see Habermas in Cowan 2000:115-116 and Craig in Copan & Tacelli 2000:32,163

⁹¹⁶ This is well expressed by Houston: “[Resurrection] is this mighty act of God which affirms the order of things, natural and moral, and provides a basis for [Paul’s] call to the Athenians to redirect their lives towards the God for whom they should seek and find... In postmodernity, many of our neighbours may feel that such talk of resurrection from the dead is another virtual reality, a construction of hopes and dreams, but nothing more. Others may suggest that this is merely the ultimate power-play to gain control of hapless individuals. But Paul simply invites his readers freely to enter into the world of Ultimate Reality.” (Houston 1998:187)

First, McGrath and Carson's applications of two of Paul's aims ('to interest' and 'to confront', respectively) to the postmodern challenge are consistent with their explicit views on apologetics (6.2.1) and Acts 17 (6.2.2).

Secondly, the two apologists' shared balanced understanding of the ambiguous postmodern context (6.2.3) has for both of them in practice become a one-sided emphasis. Thus, McGrath and Carson's approaches seem representative of the 'either-or'-tendency noted in 5.3.1.2.⁹¹⁷

Thirdly, whereas McGrath's focus on 'to interest' seems related to the postmodern openness to any personal stories and beliefs, Carson's emphasis on 'to confront' seems connected to the postmodern dismissal of any absolute truth claims. These different contributions, however, indicate that both these aims are legitimate and complementary in a postmodern context.

Fourthly, the application of the two aims 'to interest' and 'to confront' needs to be developed beyond McGrath and Carson's legitimate contributions. Thus, in order 'to interest', Christian apologists would need to explore creative ways of using the postmodern openness to 'the epistemic permission' of the Christian's 'story' to show how the 'biblical story' makes sense of the shared 'human story'. Further, in order 'to confront', Christian apologists would need to explore creative ways of challenging the postmodern worldview

⁹¹⁷ See footnote 529.

so that postmodernists may see the need to investigate the moral and spiritual basis for their 'life-story'.

Fifthly, McGrath and Carson's hesitance to apply 'to persuade' as an aim may be due to the fact that neither author develops persuasive apologetic arguments *per se* (see 6.2.1.4) nor appropriate justification procedures for the postmodern context (see 6.2.3). However, it was argued in 6.2.3.4 that apologetics as persuasive argumentative discourse is indispensable also in a postmodern context.

These critical observations indicate that McGrath and Carson have presented valid and relevant applications to the postmodern challenge of two of Paul's aims, namely 'to interest' and 'to confront', but that these applications may need to be further developed. Even more importantly, however, if Acts 17 is to be properly utilized as an apologetic model, Paul's aim 'to persuade' also needs to be explicitly applied in a postmodern context.

6.4 Conclusions

The second major research question (see 1.5.2) focused on *whether, and (in that case) to what extent, the content of the Acts 17 model may be applied with validity and relevance in contemporary apologetics*. These aspects are addressed in this section, primarily on the basis of 6.2-3.

6.4.1 Comparing 'then' and 'now': On identical elements

This chapter has identified a number of identical elements between the Lucan-Pauline model in Acts 17 ('then') *and* McGrath and Carson's applications of this model in relation to postmodernism ('now'). *First*, both McGrath and Carson presuppose that *the key defining worldview elements* of Paul's apologetic remain normative for Christian apologetics in a postmodern context. *Secondly*, to some extent, McGrath and Carson's apologetic approaches to postmodernism implicitly reflect Paul's *approach*. *Thirdly*, both authors apply parts of (one or more of) Paul's *arguments*. *Fourthly*, McGrath and Carson both emphasize one of Paul's *aims*. *Thus, both authors treat key parts of the Acts 17 model as valid and relevant in a postmodern context.*

In their most significant apologetic contributions, both authors rely on the Acts 17 model: Whereas McGrath interprets and applies Paul's use of God-given points of contact in order to generate interest for the Christian Gospel – as inherently attractive – in a postmodern context, Carson interprets and applies Paul's use of 'the biblical storyline' in order to confront postmodernism with a coherent Christian worldview. *These key contributions from McGrath and Carson illustrate the possibility of applying key elements from the model in Acts 17:16-34 to challenges in contemporary apologetics.*

6.4.2 Comparing 'then' and 'now': On missing elements

This chapter has identified a number of missing elements in McGrath and Carson's applications of Acts 17, when compared with the first-century model. The following reasons may account for such missing elements.

First, some missing elements seem primarily to be due to *limitations in McGrath and Carson's interpretations of the passage as apologetics*. Neither author a) interprets Paul's speech as a proper apologetic follow-up speech, b) develops Paul's justification procedures in the *agora*, c) presents a comprehensive and balanced view on Paul's approach, arguments, and aims, nor d) develops the evidential element in Paul's 'Resurrection argument'.

Secondly, some missing elements seem primarily to be due to *limitations in McGrath and Carson's applications of the passage as apologetics*. Their applications tend to be more selective than their interpretations, as seen e.g. in the lacking emphases in Carson on common ground and appeals to creation. Despite their contextual sensitivity, neither author shows an adequate contextual understanding of 'postmodern phenomena'. Their applications are also limited by commitments to 'non-foundationalism' (McGrath) or presuppositionalism (Carson), esp. in their lack of explicit appeals to logic or evidence.

Thirdly, in any application of the Acts 17 model, missing elements may be due to *discontinuous characteristics when comparing the Acts 17 and the contemporary contexts*. Such contemporary features are 'post-Christian', 'post-modern', 'secular and religious', and 'emphasis on *pathos*'. Paul's speech dealt e.g. with a limited number of fundamental apologetic issues in a pre-Christian setting and may thus be irrelevant – or relevant only by implication – to other issues in a post-Christian context. Even though such discontinuous features for the most part neither are identified nor discussed in McGrath or Carson's

contributions, they *need to be addressed if the Acts 17 model is to be applied with proper contextual sensitivity*.

A *fourth* possible reason, which neither McGrath nor Carson discusses, is that missing features in any adequate application of the passage also may be due to *proper limitations in the passage itself*. Such elements include the following: a) As shown in 5.4.1, the passage is not intended as a complete Pauline apologetic model. b) As argued in 5.4.2, the Acts 17 model has both explicit and implicit apologetic features. c) As shown in 3.5.2.2 and chapter 4, the speech is not a ‘missionary primer’ but an apologetic follow-up speech. d) As a proper example of applied apologetics (cf. 1.2.1 and chapter 5), Paul’s speech is intended for and delivered to a specific audience in a specific context. *Such key elements need to control the potential use of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model ‘now’.*

6.4.3 Comparing ‘then’ and ‘now’: Towards a more adequate application

The contributions of McGrath and Carson have shown the legitimacy of the focus on Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model in the postmodern context. However, neither author develops the model fully.

It was suggested in 6.3.4 that the features of Acts 17, which justifiably may be seen as valid and relevant in a postmodern context, go beyond those elements identified and applied by either McGrath or Carson. This presupposes, however, that key postmodern challenges are recognized and met.

This chapter, then, has offered a perspective for an exegetically more comprehensive as well as a contextually more relevant application of this New Testament model in a postmodern context.

6.4.4 Answering research question 2

It is now possible to offer an answer to the second research question, at least in relation to the specific postmodern challenge:

a) The truth claims in the Acts 17 model remain valid and relevant also in the contemporary context as the defining *content* of a Christian worldview. b) The general emphases in Acts 17 regarding contextual understanding, application of appropriate justification procedures and ‘positive deconstruction’ of alternative worldviews seem valid and relevant in any context. The common contextual features of biblical illiteracy and pluralism point to the relevance of Paul’s specific apologetic *approach* to the contemporary postmodern challenge. c) Paul’s *arguments* may be seen as potentially relevant, but need to be further developed contextually, if they are to be seen as properly valid over against philosophical and popular postmodernism. d) Paul’s *aims* seem relevant and valid in a postmodern context, if properly applied and when seen as complementary.

These conclusions indicate that the content, the approach, the arguments, and the aims of the apologetic model in Acts 17:16-34 may justifiably be seen as valid and relevant for contemporary apologetics in comparable ‘agora contexts’, at least in relation to the postmodern challenge.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Outline:

7.1 A Summary

7.2 Some Implications for Apologetics

7.1 A Summary

The intention of this critical exploration of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model ‘then’ and ‘now’ has been to offer answers to the research questions identified in 1.5.

The *first sub-question* addressed whether Luke (as the narrator) intended to provide his readers (i.e. the narratees) with an apologetic model in Acts 17:16-34 by recording what Paul supposedly did in Athens. The analysis in chapter 2 indicated a) that Acts 17:16-34 contains explicit apologetic material, b) that this material seems to fit a wider, positive Lucan description in Acts of apologetic convictions, approaches and arguments, and c) that this positive pattern can be related to a plausible dual Lucan apologetic intention with Acts (as written for Christians *both* in order to confirm the truth-value of their Christian faith *and* to provide them with apologetic tools and models for reaching outsiders). This

preliminary analysis was confirmed in subsequent chapters and gives *a plausible literary context for seeing Acts 17:16-34 as an intended apologetic model*.

The *second sub-question* addressed whether Acts 17:16-34 provides valid insights into the apologetic thinking and practice of the apostle Paul (as the supposed orator). The basic historical purpose of Acts (chapter 2) and Luke's general credibility as a historian (chapter 3) make it highly probable that this specific passage should be seen as claiming to be historically authentic. It was argued in chapter 3 that this claim should be seen as valid, since the account in Acts 17:16-34 can be shown to be appropriate both for Athens as the alleged situation (on the basis of an exploration of Athenian motifs in the text) and for Paul as the alleged speaker (on the basis of a comparison with relevant passages in Paul's letters). The subsequent exegetical study in chapter 4 confirmed *the legitimacy of taking this passage as Luke's credible, but highly condensed, account of the apostle Paul as apologist in Athens*.

The answers to these two sub-questions constituted the basis (together with the in-depth exegetical discussion in chapters 3 and 4) for the analysis and assessment in chapter 5 of Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic model 'then'. This led to an answer to the first major research question, i.e. *whether the key elements of the Acts 17 model can be identified, and if so, whether they are intended as normative, recommended or repeatable*. This answer (i.e. the findings) may be summarized as follows:

- a) Luke's account describes the defining, *normative content* of Paul's truth claims as consisting of key Judeo-Christian convictions about who God is and how he has revealed himself.
- b) Luke's account describes Paul's proactive *approach* in Athens as a *recommended* apologetic in biblically illiterate and pluralistic contexts. The Lucan emphasis is on the apologist's contextual understanding, his application of appropriate justification procedures and his 'positive deconstruction' of alternative worldviews.
- c) Luke's account describes Paul's *overall argument* in Athens as a move *from* the credibility of a Judeo-Christian natural theology (over against competing natural theologies) *through* the plausibility and implications of God's ultimate authority (over against competing claims to ultimate authority) *to* the significance and evidence of the Resurrection (over against competing 'stories' and ideas). These arguments are recommended to the narratees.
- d) Luke's account implicitly describes Paul's *threefold aim* ('to interest', 'to persuade', and 'to confront') as recommended, thus encouraging his Christian readers – in their apologetic – to be aware of and interact with people's presuppositions.

Having thus established Acts 17:16-34 as an apologetic New Testament model, the discussion moved in chapter 6 from 'then' to 'now'. After having selected *postmodernism* as a key contemporary challenge and *Alister E. McGrath and Donald A. Carson* as two significant dialogue partners, this chapter presented an analysis and critique of these two

authors' views on apologetics, Acts 17:16-34, and the postmodern challenge. Significant contributions to contemporary apologetics were identified, primarily on the uses of *either* points of contact (McGrath) *or* 'the biblical plot-line' (Carson). These contributions demonstrate the legitimacy of the focus in this thesis on Acts 17 as an apologetic model. The critical dialogue established, however, that neither author has fully developed this model exegetically nor in terms of application to the postmodern challenge.

This led to an answer to the second major research question, i.e. *to what extent the content of the Acts 17 model may be applied with validity and relevance in contemporary apologetics*. This answer (i.e. the findings) may be summarized as follows:

- a) McGrath and Carson appropriately presuppose that the worldview *content* of the Acts 17 model – about who God is and how he has revealed himself – remain valid and relevant as defining elements of a Christian worldview also in the contemporary context.
- b) The Lucan emphases in the Acts 17 model on contextual understanding, application of appropriate justification procedures and 'positive deconstruction' of alternative worldviews may justifiably be seen as valid and relevant in any context. Despite a number of significant differences between the Acts 17 and the postmodern contexts, the common features of biblical illiteracy and pluralism (as identified by McGrath and Carson) indicate that Paul's *approach* in the Athenian *agora* could be seen as relevant to the contemporary challenge of postmodernism.

c) McGrath and Carson's partial applications of Paul's *arguments* illustrate the potential relevance of the arguments in a postmodern context, but also that these arguments need to be further developed in view of key postmodern challenges: 1. If 'the natural theology argument' should be seen as showing the adequacy of Christian views about humanity, the universe, and God, it must be justified *over against postmodern* deconstruction and reconstruction of identities, explorations of various perspectives, and naturalistic presuppositions. 2. If 'the ultimate authority argument' should be seen as showing the legitimacy of God's authority and the obligation of humanity, it must be justified *over against postmodern* suspicions and consumerism. 3. If 'the Resurrection argument' should be seen as resonating with ultimate human concerns, indicating the uniqueness and authority of Jesus, and being based on sufficient, available evidence, it must be justified *over against postmodern* ambiguous attitudes, explorations of any 'stories', and indifference to and uncertainty about history.

d) McGrath and Carson's applications of Paul's *aims* show the validity and relevance of 'to interest' and 'to confront' in a postmodern context. However, the aim 'to persuade' also needs to be explicitly applied in such '*agora contexts*', if Acts 17 is to be properly utilized as an apologetic model.

Thus, this thesis claims that Luke in Acts 17:16-34 presents an apologetic model from apostolic practice with implications for contemporary apologetics in comparable 'agora contexts'.

7.2 Some Implications for Apologetics

This critical exploration has focused on *a point of “insufficient attention”*⁹¹⁸ in contemporary apologetics, in order to make a critical and creative contribution both to the ‘science’ and the ‘art’ of apologetics. The uniqueness of this contribution to apologetics lies also in *its interdisciplinary approach*, with an integration of New Testament exegesis, apologetics, and cultural analysis. It is now appropriate, in view of the preceding summary of this thesis, to indicate *some key implications for apologetics*, including some suggestions for further research.

7.2.1 *The thesis and the ‘science’ of apologetics*

The preface to the thesis stated that contemporary apologetics largely seems to be characterised by “a neglect of biblical foundations and models”⁹¹⁹. If so, this thesis should be seen as making a significant contribution to apologetics as a theological science by developing Acts 17:16-34 as a key New Testament model both exegetically and in terms of contemporary apologetics.

First, the thesis implicitly demonstrates the biblical legitimacy of apologetics. It has been shown that apologetics – as the rational justification of Christian truth claims over against specific questions, objections and alternatives – was an essential part of Acts 17:16-34 in its New Testament context, both in terms of Luke’s intention (as the narrator) and

⁹¹⁸ McGrath, A. 1998a:9; see also 6.2.1.1.

Paul's strategy (as the orator). If biblical material is to be considered foundational for contemporary theology, the content and status of this key New Testament passage seem to indicate that apologetics should be seen as a legitimate endeavour.

*Secondly, it seems appropriate to indicate that the New Testament model in Acts 17:16-34 has significant implications for some key issues in the contemporary 'science' of apologetics. The first issue is "the importance of theology to apologetics"*⁹²⁰, which is amply illustrated in this New Testament passage with its emphasis on God's transcendence and immanence *and* God's self-disclosure in general and special revelation as key theological convictions for Paul's apologetic (see 5.4.2.1). The *second* issue is *the legitimacy and role of positive apologetics*, where this thesis has shown that the notion of 'epistemic obligation' (as defined in 1.2.2), despite being controversial in a postmodern context, was central to Paul's apologetic in Athens. Thus, the claim that a "careful study of the biblical data makes it clear that it is legitimate for Christians to engage in both defensive and offensive apologetics"⁹²¹ has been validated in relation to Acts 17:16-34⁹²². The *third* issue is *methodology in apologetics*. The developed 'Acts 17 model' (see 5.4.2) seems to rule out narrower forms of evidentialism, presuppositionalism and 'Reformed epistemology'. However, the identified argumentative structure (of 'natural theology – ultimate authority – Resurrection') seems closer to, but not identical with, the classical

⁹¹⁹ See preface, p. xxi.

⁹²⁰ McGrath, A. 2000d:24; see also 6.2.1.1.

⁹²¹ Netland 1991a:57.

⁹²² Netland refers to Mark 2:1-12; Luke 24:25-27; John 4:53; 5:36-40; 10:25,38; 11:45; 20:30-31; Acts 9:22; 13:16-41; 17:2-3,22-31; and 1 Cor. 15:3-19. (See Netland 1991a:57.)

apologetic “natural theology-then-historical-evidences approach”⁹²³. Thus, the established ‘Acts 17 model’ does not lead to a necessary commitment to any of the traditional apologetic traditions, but rather (as indicated in 5.4.2 and 6.2.1-2) to a renewed critical and creative engagement with such traditional approaches.

Thirdly, the need for further work in the area of biblical apologetics arises out of the thesis. This thesis has established Acts 17:16-34 as *one* significant biblical apologetic model and has argued for the consistency between this specific passage and a) Acts at large and b) the Pauline letters. This leads naturally to the question whether the developed Acts 17 model is consistent with the wider biblical material, with specific reference to the Gospels ('the apologetics of Jesus'⁹²⁴) and the Old Testament (especially 'the apologetics of the prophets'). Old Testament prophetic material has been shown (in chapters 4 and 5) to be significant for the understanding of Paul's apologetic in Athens: specific passages (such as Is. 42:5), the prophetic understanding of idolatry (such as Is. 40-44), and the general creational and providential monotheistic outlook (such as in Is. 42:5-9) all play a significant role in Paul's speech. An analysis of the meaning and significance of *the apologetic dimensions of significant Old Testament prophetic material such as Is. 40-44*, as set in the context of religious pluralism, would thus contribute to a more comprehensive view of the biblical validity of the ‘Acts 17 model’.

⁹²³ Cowan 2000:377.

⁹²⁴ See esp. Gustavsson 2001.

Thus, this thesis contributes to the contemporary 'science' of apologetics by a) an implicit demonstration of the biblical legitimacy of apologetics, b) an explicit interaction with key contemporary issues related to (1) the foundational role of theology in apologetics, (2) the legitimacy and role of positive apologetics, and (3) the methodology of apologetics, and c) a tentative indication of Is. 40-44 as a significant topic for further research in the area of biblical apologetics.

7.2.2 The thesis and the 'art' of apologetics

It was assumed at the outset of this thesis that the contemporary 'art' of apologetics to a large extent seems to be characterised by a neglect of biblical models. If so, this thesis should be seen as making a significant contribution to the contemporary practice of apologetics by developing Acts 17:16-34 as a role model.

First, the thesis explicitly illustrates that New Testament practices of apologetics are significant resources for the contemporary 'art' of apologetics. Thus, the exploration of the meaning and significance of potential biblical apologetic models seems highly appropriate in order to uncover normative, recommended or repeatable apologetic principles and/or strategies for contemporary apologetics.

Secondly, the thesis has established Acts 17:16-34 as a significant and relevant model for contemporary apologetics in 'agora contexts'. The role model in Acts 17:16-34 provides the contemporary apologist with apologetic tools (as summarized in 7.1) for relating to a pluralistic context of competing worldviews, and esp. for relating to 'biblical

illiterates'. Thus, the Christian apologist argues for the truth of an authentic biblical worldview, but in contexts where people do not know of and believe in the Bible. Scripture should not be referred to as an authority ("the Word of God") which people have to accept *before* coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, it may be suggested that the appropriate way to argue is the other way around, i.e. that a belief in the authority of the Bible is a possible (or even plausible) consequence of a belief in the authority of Jesus. The apologist is thus released to argue openly for the truth of the Christian faith in the contemporary marketplace of ideas, without having to resort to an authoritarian approach. This means inviting people openly to investigate the self-consistency, the empirical adequacy, and the adequacy and experiential relevance of essential Christian truth claims about 'one God and one Lord'.

*Thirdly, the need for further work in the area of apologetic practice in relation to the postmodern challenge arises out of the thesis.*⁹²⁵ One key question (which neither McGrath nor Carson has addressed explicitly) is whether, and in that case to what extent, a given communicative context – such as the contemporary media – affects the shape and influence of argumentative strategies in apologetics. The relevance of such an issue to this thesis is due to descriptions of a) the ancient Athenian *agora* as 'the first mass medium in history'⁹²⁶ (which may be related to the narrative aside in 17:21; see 4.3.5) and b) 'the postmodern' and mass media as related cultural phenomena (see 6.1.2), as well as to the noted

⁹²⁵ See esp. 6.3.4, where a perspective was offered towards a more adequate application of the Acts 17 model to the postmodern challenge.

⁹²⁶ See Berg Eriksen 1987.

difference (in 6.3.4.1) between the traditional emphasis on *logos* and rationality in ancient Athens and the postmodern distrust of reason and emphasis on *pathos*. *There is thus a need to develop a critical analysis of the role and nature of 'postmodern media' as a communicative context for apologetics.* Such an analysis would address various significant roles of the media in relation to apologetics⁹²⁷ – e.g. as a formative cultural presence (media as 'wallpaper'), as an arena (media as 'marketplace of ideas'), and as a story-teller (media as 'secular pulpit') – as well as the extent to which the content, the approach, the arguments and the aims of the Acts 17 model are relevant in a communicative context of 'postmodern media'.

Thus, this thesis contributes to the contemporary 'art' of apologetics by a) illustrating the significance of New Testament resources, b) providing key tools for apologetics in 'agora contexts', and c) indicating that the communicative context of 'postmodern media' is a significant topic for further research in the area of apologetic practice.

⁹²⁷ For a tentative analysis of the content and form of the media in relation to apologetics: see Dahle 2000a. Cf. also Dalton 1999 and Dahle 2000b.

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